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Liesl Schillinger
It's practically a universal truth that all high schoolers worry about losing their virginity. Supercops, the second fiction piece for PLAYBOY by New York–based literary critic and acclaimed author Schillinger, tells the story of Meredith, an overachieving 18-year-old who decides to make studying sex her top priority.

Brian B Hayes
An internationally renowned photographer whose work is published worldwide. Brian is mostly known for his glamour style photography. With over 25 years of shooting gorgeous models Brian's work has graced the covers of top men's magazines worldwide. Brian also publishes a series of glamour calendars which are best sellers every year. You can find his work at BrianBHayes.com.

Frank Bill (no image)
In the short story The Disgruntled Americans, an ex-cop and his redneck relatives take a stand against corporate greed by staging an explosive heist. Bill, whose second novel, The Savage, taps into his southern Indiana roots to deliver a tense and timely portrait of the frustrations brewing in middle America.

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CONTENTS

MUSIC *The War on Drugs' thoughtful frontman navigates the band's major-label debut while breathing new life into rock and roll* **10**

PICTORIAL *Nicole Procyk, bombshell and dancer who believes in following your dreams and doing what you love!* **14**

FICTION *One person's profit is another's reason for revenge in Frank Bill's The Disgruntled Americans* **22**

PICTORIAL *Josie Capllonch, a Swedish beauty who lives to travel the world, keep fit and eat as much good food as she possibly can* **30**

#CAPETOWNRX *Kristoffersson wraps up a hot, fast and dramatic racing event in style* **38**

COVER FEATURE *Kayleigh Swenson, the viking barbie out to slay the world with her stunning good looks* **48**

MILITARY *When sexes collide: a look at attrction and assault in the armed forces* **56**

FASHION *Step out and up the ante with these quick and functional must-haves* **60**

PICTORIAL *Anastasia Doll, the french stunner who loves to shop, look pretty and kick a lot of butt too!* **66**

ADVISOR *F#ckboys, celibacy and the US election: Bridget Phetasy addresses the important issues* **74**

GAMING *Win a deadly game of survival or smash your way through an army of undead* **76**

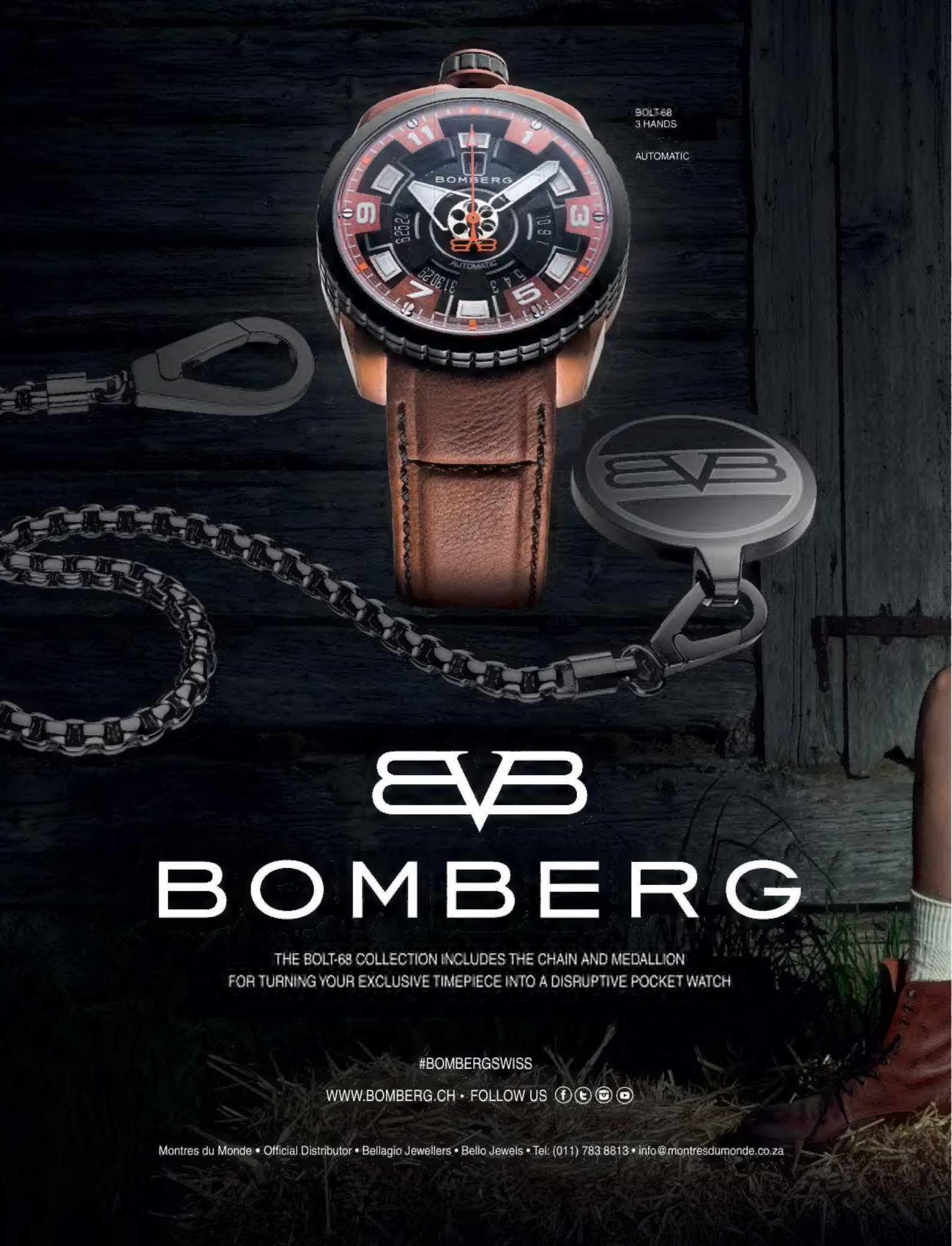
FICTION *An 18-year-old focuses her studies on a lesson in seduction in Liesl Schillinger's Supercops* **78**

PICTORIAL *Rachel Kronish, the proud LA girl with a perfect figure, passion for fashion and big dreams* **86**

HERITAGE *A vinyl countdown: the history of Hef's music label.* **92**

ON THE COVER *Kayleigh Swenson, photography by GEA Images*

No 7 January 2018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REINVENTING THE GREAT AMERICAN ROCK BAND

The War on Drugs has proven that rock and roll can be epic and humble, classic and brand-new all at once. The band's reclusive frontman survived its major-label debut.

There's only a faint whiff of weed in the air when Philadelphia rock band the War on Drugs takes the stage at New York's Bowery Ballroom. Adam Granduciel, the band's stoic mastermind, mostly keeps his eyes closed, opening them only to navigate his winking pedal boards. Sharing the cramped stage with a crew of longtime friends— bassist Dave Hartley, keyboardist Robbie Bennett, drummer Charlie Hall and multiinstrumentalists Anthony LaMarca and Jon Natchez—he conjures the aural equivalent of a riptide in slow motion. Somehow the six of them dive headlong into the rawness and romanticism of the AM-era rock-and-roll canon with the precision and restraint of a chamber ensemble.

By **SARA GRANT**

"THERE'S NO MORE MYTH. WE'RE JUST OUT THERE DOING WHAT WE DO."

It's a far cry from the band's early days, when Granduciel shared the stage with former member Kurt Vile. Back then, he sometimes played whole sets on his knees, slinging beers while wailing on his guitar. Tonight Granduciel speaks only when necessary—such as when he introduces a Warren Zevon song that could easily be mistaken for one of his own.

"I sometimes don't understand how our songs get so long," the 38-year-old musician says two weeks earlier at a secluded Bushwick café. His casual appearance onstage and off—T-shirt, black pants, dark messy hair to his clavicle— belies a thrum of anxiousness. Talking about his coming weeks, which include a spot on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*, he taps the metal table incessantly. You get the sense he's still adjusting to his life circa 2014, when the Drugs album Lost in the Dream debuted at 26 on the *Billboard 200* albums chart. Charting is a rare feat for any rock band in a world where popular music overwhelmingly favours more digital-friendly strains. Acts like Twenty One Pilots, Imagine Dragons and Ed Sheeran have kept rock visible, at least, by blending it with rap, EDM, dancehall and other metronomic styles. But with a few exceptions, the only rock outfits competing with bona fide pop stars such as Adele, Beyoncé and Drake are either knighted or dead.

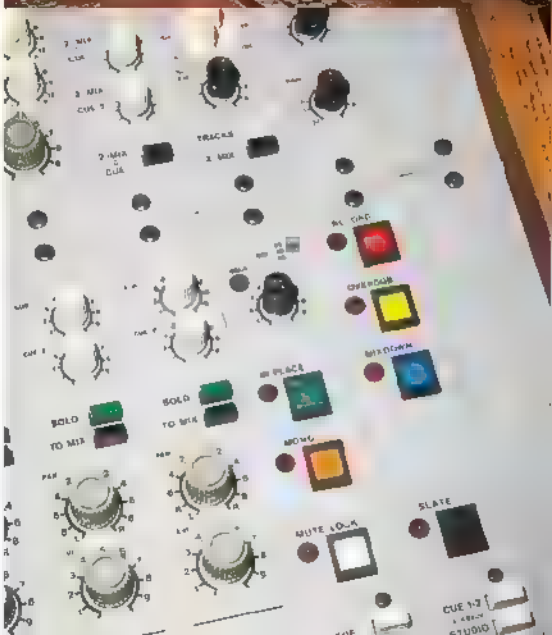
That the War on Drugs made it upstream at all—let alone with instrumentals blooming well past the three-minute mark and musical touchstones including Dire Straits, Pink Floyd and Bruce Springsteen—is in itself noteworthy. But the band's 2013 single "Red Eyes" didn't just dine on novelty; it struck a nerve. Seemingly overnight, backyard gigs turned into national television slots on Kimmel and Fallon. To date, "Red Eyes" has more than 47¢million streams on Spotify. The band's spike in popularity is still jarring to its gentle- spirited frontman. "We don't really have the time to grow into the rooms we're playing," Granduciel says. "Now it's like, *boom*, 6,000 people." And with its new record, *A Deeper Understanding*, the g roup is in l ine to take on the mantle of Great American Rock Band. The War on Drugs might just prove that serious album-oriented rock groups can grow as organically on streaming services as they once did via stadium tailgates and record stores.

These days, Granduciel lives with his girlfriend, actress Krysten Ritter, in her Greenpoint apartment. While she films season two of Jessica Jones, a leisurely day for the man of the house begins with a carefully prepped cup of coffee ("I may or may not have a fancy setup," he says) and a walk with Ritter's Chihuahua terrier around the park. Ritter was at the Bowery show, leaning against the balcony in an oversize tank top, her ink-black hair drawn up in a high ponytail.

In the nearly two years it took to make *A Deeper Understanding*, Granduciel worried that his peripatetic new life—living in Los Angeles and then Brooklyn, commuting to Philadelphia, booking studio time in all three places and beyond— would compromise his work. But in hindsight, the physical distraction of moving around seems to have tempered Granduciel's obsessiveness. He once allegedly holed up in his house for months, and tales abound that the aptly named *Lost in the Dream* nearly cost him his sanity. Today, he only occasionally summons those monastic instincts. He's healthier, happier, maybe even in love (he smiles but stays mum on that point), and he appears to be at peace—as much as one can expect a perfectionist to be. Consider the new album's encyclopedic credits. "If it says I play synthesizer, that usually means I recorded 10 different synths on that song," he says. He smiles. Understanding was recorded in nine studios across L.A., New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere.

Can serenity coexist with this level of obsession? Granduciel pauses, his expression

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEREMY L EBMAN



turning a shade more serious. "Part of turning something in is being aware that you've missed the mark on a few things."

• • •

Granduciel was raised in Dover, Massachusetts, the middle child of a small-business owner and a Montessori-school administrator who are still married. He went to high school at one of the oldest schools in America. ("Yeah, that was drilled into our heads.") His father spent 40 years in the garment business. At one point he ran 17 stores selling designer clothing that he shuttled from Fashion Avenue in New York City in his Volvo.

"My dad is probably the biggest War on Drugs fan," Granduciel says of his father, who is in his 80s. "He comes on tour with us. He figured out Google Alerts. I'm surprised he's kept up with it as much as he has. He's got these big headphones, and when I go home to visit, I'll see him asleep in the chair and I'll be like, 'Oh my God, he's listening to 'Red Eyes.'" After years of defending life choices that were at times confusing to his parents, sharing the band's success, even over quiet moments such as these, feels like a victory to Granduciel.

Like his father, Granduciel has had an irrepressible work ethic from an early age. "I got in trouble for being an idiot—you know, crashing the car, falling asleep at the wheel." Because he was drunk? High? "No, no," he says. "I was exhausted from f#ckin' life. It was tough. All these things to do all the time." He taught himself to play guitar in seventh grade, amassing thick binders of printed-off guitar tabs. ("Basically all of *Siamese Dream*, but I couldn't do the solos.") At Dickinson College, a liberal arts school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, he studied art and waited tables. After graduation, he worked his way through more restaurant jobs in Oakland and then Boston. His career in the service industry nearly ended after he spilt grease on a baby's head at a restaurant that required him to wear an American-flag tie. (The tie, he ruefully adds, was constantly streaked with peppercorn ranch dressing.)

So when Granduciel moved to Philadelphia in 2003, sharing a light blue row house in not-yet-gentrified Fishtown with a revolving set of roommates, he felt liberated—even if the house gave him mold poisoning, he says, laughing. He met Hartley, now 37, after college, when they were two under-bathed artsy guys working at a real-estate firm near the University of Pennsylvania.

The War on Drugs maintains a practice space in Philadelphia, where core members Hartley, Bennett and Hall currently reside. Tomorrow, Granduciel says, he'll rent a car to drop off some gear and clock in a rehearsal before the band debuts new material on national television. It's a little impractical, but keeping a foothold in Philadelphia is more than just an old habit for Granduciel. It has become part of the band's identity and, by extension, his own.

And identity matters to him, no matter how much he hides behind eyelids, hair and reverb. "I wondered if I had lost a little bit of my identity in my music, and how much of my identity is my music?" he says. "What am I in relation to my music? How much of me singing these songs is a character and how much is my real life?"

Moving around seems to have had a sharpening effect on the band's sound. There's a grandeur and a cohesion to *A Deeper Understanding* that are different from the busy excitement of *Lost in the Dream*. The album's first official single, "Holding

"I WONDERED IF I HAD LOST MY IDENTITY. WHAT AM I IN RELATION TO MY MUSIC?"

single, "Holding On," sounds as though Granduciel took a glass pipette to "Thunder Road" and transformed it into an energized new beast. Unlike Springsteen's, Granduciel's process doesn't revolve around lyrics. He spends most of his time tinkering with the instrumentation until the timbres start to tell their own story. But to hear Granduciel describe his work, starting with the arrangement is like entering a palace through the back door. Despite the recognition he has gained, he still carries an element of the amateur.

He's still the kid hiding underneath the covers, studying his pain.

• • •

The conversation never strays far from Granduciel's tumultuous creative process. "I'm learning that I'm more instinctual than I give myself credit for," he says, shifting his weight in his seat. He listens to his demos over and over, with no great design in mind, waiting for that flicker. "Maybe when I was 24 and all I listened to was 1964 and 1966 Bob Dylan, you'd have someone sitting here trying to create a myth around himself," he says. "But it's like there's no more myth. We're just out there doing what we do."

Granduciel's intuition yielded his finest new song, "Thinking of a Place." It's the kind he's always wanted to write—a Tom Joad–style solo-trek song, as he describes it—but he says he never could have done it with just pen and paper.

"I can chip away with ease for months at the sonics, and it doesn't get me frustrated. The words, though, I get very frustrated," he says. He improvises off a scratch vocal track, which he describes as "total gibberish," while working on the other arrangements. When it's time to focus on the vocals, he'll return to the demos and "chase the inflexions" like an audio Rorschach test. "I'm writing around sounds, if that makes any sense," he says. He pauses for a beat. "You're kind of like, 'Well, it doesn't have to be f#ckin' Raymond Carver.'"

> *"It was back in Little Bend that I saw you*
> *Light was changing on the water Where birds above had flown*

That's how "Place" begins. It's hard to believe the exquisite specificity of the first verse came to him on a whim. "I was like, 'little bend?' I didn't even know what it was," he says. "It was syllables. I did some research on the words little bend, and it turns out it was this beautiful RV park on the banks of the Missouri River. Then it becomes something, like how do I tie this into a story?" There was pain in your eyes So you vanished in the night Missouri River in the distance So I lied upon the lawn. He goes on. "Every song kind of lives in that state for six or seven months, and everything's in flux. Every song has its bit of improvisation." He flashes a smile, suddenly aware he's talking too fast. "It's a roundabout way to end up somewhere, but it's what you gotta do, I guess."

On A Deeper Understanding, Granduciel had a writing partner—in spirit, anyway—in Bruce Springsteen. When Granduciel was living in Hollywood in 2015, he rediscovered the 1980 double album The River and recognized the chill of uncertainty in Springsteen's voice as his own. "It's a record about being 30 years old, watching your friends have kids and families, and thinking, When am I going to enter that part of my life?" he says. "I think that's what I sought, what I was trying to get to on this record. I'm a little older than the Boss was then, but how am I part of this whole thing, you know?"

Granduciel looks up from the table. It's almost time to go home and feed the dog. "I also figured out I could drive from my studio to my house in Hollywood in about one 'The River,'" he notes of the album's title track. His eyes darken to a smile. At the Bowery show, his father wears a nearly identical expression as he shoots an iPhone video from the balcony. He's focusing not on his son onstage but on the crowd below, bobbing and swaying to the music. It's a scene neither could have imagined just a few years ago. And it's a fitting beginning for a new album derived from travelling down—and trusting in—new roads.

"Seven minutes," says Granduciel. "No traffic. All green lights." ■

NICOLE
PROCYK
DAVID FILLION
JANUARY 2018

N

co e is a Toronto-based model and dancer who believes in fo lowing your dreams and do ng what you love. She is unapologetically herself and fu of conf dence!

Hobbies and interests
Dance, fitness, marketing, psychology and trave ng.

My goals and career ambitions
I would love to take my modelling career as far as I can go and do bigger and bigger pub icat ons. I want to travel as much as I can and shoot around the world. I also want to ra se mental health awareness one day

Who inspires me
Demi Lovato, Lana Del Rey and Kate Moss.

My favourite quote
"My wild and free side unsettled some, and unwedged others." - Brig tte Bardot

Turn-on
A fit phys que

Turn-off
Bad breath

The perfect date
A vineyard or a chi day by the ocean!

My girl crush
Selena Gomez

My favourite food
Ramen

My biggest fear
Not succeeding in what I want to!

One destination I'd love to visit
Tha and

I'm not embarrassed to say
I make mistakes!

For more of Nicole's adventures you can follow her on Instagram @nicoleprocyk and on Facebook @nicoleprocykofficial

THE DISGRUNTLED AMERICANS
Something's rotten in the state of Indiana. A heartland tale of redneck revenge
FRNAK BILL
61

START WITH THE LETTER ...

Dear Motherfu#ckers,
This was never about the green-grey
wrinkled denominations of dead presidents.
It was about blistering eyes wide open.
From the suit in the well-kept suite with
a tanned-toned-pedicured wife in a
5,000-square-foot red-stone structure
across from the Country Club Golf Course to
the beagle-bellied drunk in a god damned
trucker's cap married to a call us -handed
wife in a beat-down trailer of rust planted
down a hard-to-find country back road
where the land is waiting to be sold and
timbered for corporate America. What we
wanted to do was wake up every one of you
c#ck suckers from your stoops of comfort
and mundane day-to-day upper, middle
or lower bullshit. No social class is safe
Welcome to our goddamned awakening!
- The Disgruntled Americans

GO BACK TO when a matte-black-primered Chevy Astro van with a 350 small block thumping under the hood wheels down the faded lot of yellow lines, backs into the first spot in row 11, three men inside, brothers. It's early. The engine kills and they wait. They wait and watch patrons disperse and scatter from vehicles like piss-ants drawn to fresh pulp, rushing into the Harrison County Walmart, smoking cigarettes, drinking pop or coffee, discarding cups and butts on the asphalt.

The men's eyes light up as a grey box-shaped armoured truck with bold blue letters spelling BRINKS pulls up to the south doors of Walmart, the HOME & PHARMACY end. Two uniformed guards step out, each with a nine millimetre strapped to his right side. The three brothers check the digital bands wrapped around their wrists. Four minutes total. That's how long the guards have to shoulder through the crowd of moans, groans and all-day stench of shoppers. Go to the door beside the service desk. Collect the cash. Get back to the truck. Cut down the parking lot's row 10 and head to their next stop.

Kenny, the oldest brother, a county cop who retired six months ago, and Ronnie, brother number two, a Walmart employee, wait exactly one minute. Just enough time for the Brinks guards to get into the money room next to the service desk. Kenny slides open the van's side door. Steps into the cold November air that menthols his bones. Dressed in black overalls, full black beard glued to his face that is make-upped with military green, brown and black as if hunting, a knit cap over his head, mirrored shades.

Ronnie gets out behind Kenny, outfitted identically, following him, eyeing the packed lot of happy-go-lucky motherfuckers; he's batting cleanup if needed. Everything moves in distorted slow motion. Beneath their overalls they wear Kevlar vests. Wilbur, brother number three, stays in the van. He's

the wheelman, looks identical to his brothers with a .45 Kimber resting on his right thigh He keeps tabs on the side mirrors and out the windows, his blood pressure amped. Seeing Kenny and Ronnie walk into Walmart, he picks up his cell phone, fingers a text message to his cousins, Kraut and Marty: "NUKE 'EM!" Starts the dominoes' descent

CUT TO RURAL ANARCHY, to Marty and Kraut, two burly and bearded bikers who run 135 Auto Parts. They have balls, big brass motherf#ckers that clink when they roll over in their sleep

Marty gets the text while waiting in a late-1980s Silverado in the First Savings Bank parking lot, less than half a mile from the police station but a mile down the road from Walmart. He's dressed like his cousins—knit cap, gloves, camo-polished features, fake beard, armed.

Marty navigates from the bank parking lot, pulls up at the Harrison County police station, circles around, stops behind an empty cruiser The guys'd been running tabs on this for weeks and weeks, playing everything out, driving by on timed runs, always noting a vacant pork transporter in the lot. Marty gets out, leaves the Silverado running. Slaps a hunk of putty with a detonator on the cruiser's gas cap. Gets back into the pickup and hauls ass back past the bank. Around the curve. Hangs a right onto 62 West, then a left onto Old Forest Road Removes his cell phone Presses the center button. The county cruiser expands and discharges into an arcing ball of heat, flames and tread Shuddering the earth, shattering the glass windows out of the police station. Marty is a memory heading westbound.

Kraut sits in the liquor store parking lot, watching the brown-gravy-bricked fire station, waiting. Then he hears that first window-rattling boom.

The howl of sirens abrades the air, horns roaring from the fire truck screeching out of the fire department's bay garages. Leaving two engines behind, the rig hangs a right onto Old 135 South, mashing the accelerator to the police station.

Kraut pulls from the liquor store's black pavement, hangs a right onto 135 for a split second, then another right into the fire station's drive up to the open bay door of the firehouse. Exits his vehicle, steps inside with three sticks of duct-taped dynamite, flames the fuse, tosses it beneath the first fire truck By the time Kraut turns back onto Old 135 North, the explosives detonate, blowing the big engines and local tax dollars to shreds, along with morsels of baked clay and wiring of all dimensions

He cuts through neighbourhoods. Hits 62 West, hangs a right onto Williar Avenue, then a left onto Hillview Drive, pulls up beside the fence that squares in a monstrous grain-silo-

size steel water tower the lime green colour of sunbaked duck shit, big black bold letters spelling CORYDON across the front. Kraut halves the chain with red and black bolt cutters, opens the gate, Plasters C-4 at the front, rear and sides of the tower Circles around, gets back behind the wheel and hauls ass down the snaking road to the stop sign. Hangs a right onto 62, runs the stoplight, passes the fire truck as he removes a cell phone from his pocket. Smiles, lipping the words "Goodbye, water pressure." Thumbs the centre button, detonates the C-4 Holes rip into the steel tank; a tidal wave of shrapnel and water surges across the land.

SKIP BACK TO the Walmart parking lot, just two minutes before the explosion at the police station. Hollis, brother number four, gets the text from Marty: "MOVE IT!" Steps out of a rusted 1976 Monte Carlo. Walks through one set of doors at Walmart's north entrance, past the peach schnapps smelling Santa Claus–attired greeter dinging a damn bell with a bucket for donations. People pay him no mind as he kneels next to the rough-rock interior wall, pretends to tie his boot Pulls from his overalls a chunk of Play-Dohlooking putty, tiny electric probe in its centre, presses it into the wall. Walks across to the other side of the two double doors, into a small, shotgunned area where kids search a Redbox movie kiosk for the latest releases. Hollis presses more putty-plus- detonator into the polymer-coated brick behind a stuffed- animal snatch-and-grab machine Then he slips back out, bumping shoulders with the overflow of holiday patrons. Looks out, every row of parking filled. Cold air wipes his camoed face. He glances down the sidewalk to the Brinks truck, hears the first explosion off to the south, nearly a mile away, knows it's the police cruiser

Counting Mississippis until he hears two more blasts in the distance, Hollis watches uniformed and plainclothes police officers rush out of Walmart. Their mode is panic. Working down the sidewalk, Hollis's heartbeat pastes his throat Almost to the armoured truck, he smirks, takes out his cell phone. Waits for the screams from inside. Hears them. Fingerprints the button on his cell phone. The entryway behind him combusts with brick, glass, steel, blood and more screams. His feet press the concrete fast until he meets the Brinks guard from the side, tattooing his temple with his Kimber, brother Kenny now taking up the rear

GO BACK EIGHT WEEKS EARLIER, to Kenny and his brothers running down a checklist of all that is wrong with the

world around them, their anger festering like hazardous fumes heated within a sealed container, turning to hate, ready to blow

They are fed up. Fed up with their jobs and those who determine employment. Fed up with the corporations that years before purchased farmland for pennies on the dollar, fed up with fighting wars that others would not, fed up with arresting mangle-minded men and women who'd be back out on the street by the end of the week doing the same dumb shit that got thembusted—DWI, domestic battery, B and E, the list was unending.

Kenny is the leader, the oldest brother of four, a 20-year veteran of the Harrison County police force. He'd watched as robberies in the community morphed from simple home break-ins into foot-stomp-the-door-down when you were home, the escalations coming with the flood of methamphetamine, oxycodone, heroin. Men, women, teenagers—any and all took your wares and valuables, hocked them for pennies at the local pawn shop to lace their fix. They'd get busted, but the charges would be knocked down to misdemeanour after misdemeanour for doing state- or county-funded self-help programs—second chance after second chance. In Kenny's mind it was bullshit, they needed a bullet to the rear of their brains. To be buried instead of crutched by a failed system. Add to that his disenchantment with a sheriff who sided with the politicians instead of the officers—knowing damn good and well it was the wrong decision—a sheriff who always looked the other way to keep his job. Kenny'd wasted enough time, retired six months ago, and now he wants actions, not words.

While Kenny had cared for their ailing father, the three younger brothers had fought in purposeless wars that had become nothing more than 10-second time slots of death reported on the evening news. The brothers had watched the landscape that birthed and raised them be bled out by big businesses expanding into corporations with small-town politics. Their family farm, sold when their father had fallen ill. The investors holding out until he was on his deathbed, low-balling them while the medical bills were cannibalising his existence

The mom-and-pop groceries the brothers had once known were smudged memories replaced by Walmart. The local-owned hardware and lumber stores disappeared like desolate vapours in a busted mason jar, put out of business by do-it-yourself home improvement centres like Lowe's and Home Depot. Gas stations bulldozed. Replaced by something bigger and better—BP or Shell or Marathon supermarts. Diners offering home-style meals ab andoned for the artery-stoppers of McDonald's, Burger King, Arby's, Taco Bell and DQ. All brought the promise of greasy employment where the workers could cash their checks and pump their earnings back into the places that employed them, keeping them entrapped

HE INDEXES THE TRIGGER, THE RAT-A-TAT-TAT JERK OF GUNFIRE CHISELING HIS SHOULDER. EMPTY BRASS PILES ON THE BRITTLE EARTH.

Ronnie, the number-two brother, had been short-fused by wartime's hail of bullets, flipping an ignition switch on the directives that coursed through his brain. He worked for Walmart in the oil-change area. Couldn't keep a job anywhere else because of his PTSD. Two tours in Afghanistan hunting Taliban, blowing mountain bunkers, parting the bearded evil smirks from the faces of men he'd smoked out.

Kenny had pulled security at Walmart on the side during holidays, got Ronnie's foot in the door. Ronnie gets 30 hours a week—just enough to keep benefits at bay—and he has to deal with Gilbert Stines, a general manager and sexist slob who dons a closet of Looney Tunes ties and a 1970s porn moustache and who always yammers on about who the f#ckable females are on each shift. Sometimes pinching or patting an ass, getting away with it by threatening their employment if they bark to corporate about sexual harassment. What Ronnie wants to do when he witnesses Gilbert copping a feel in the break room is plant a garden of size 12 infantry boots up the GM's backside until he's shitting vulcanised-rubber outsoles.

Brothers three and four, Wilbur and Hollis, both Iraqi Freedom veterans, work down over the hill at the union-represented factory that'd been bought up by the Canadians. They had left to fight a war, came back to jobs with their wages sliced by $4 on the hour regardless of contracts. They make frames for Ford and GM. Some co-workers punch the clock to fuel addictions to meth or booze or both, wearing their bodies down for a vice that ruptured their souls. Others have mouths to feed, car loans and mortgages to pay. All have time in and can't afford to start over somewhere else, even if they wanted. They are trapped in the dead-end labour pool of existence, dealing with plant managers. The guys who wanted to go outside the bargaining unit, ignore the contract, throw a bone to the union reps to bend the other way—these are the same guys who thought it was fair to cut union wages by four bucks on the hour while health insurance went up, the cost of living went up and the managers still got their raises every year. Same guys who go to Lisa's Bar, want to share a stool next to the workers, buy them a drink after a long shift, pretend everything is cool when it isn't even close—a fuel-saturated situation waiting to

be ignited

These discussions parted the four brothers' >> lips every Sunday down at Kenny's 100-acre plot in English, from before noon until late evening, when the big questions came up as they stood in the dead field target-practising on six sand-filled plastic drums stapled with paper targets. Questions like: Where does it all end? When does some educated f#ck open his eyes? When does some blue-haired sack of shit put ego, greed and politics aside and make things good again for the common man?

Shouldering an AR-15, pinching one eye closed, the other ball-bearing wide at the target some 50 yards away, Ronnie says, "They forced Daddy to take that million-dollar real estate offer. It sounded nice but we all knew after the taxes and medical was paid, he'd be lucky if he could afford bologna and saltines to endure his last days here on this goddamned ground."

Kenny pulls the slide on his .45 Glock, looks to Ronnie. "You're right. At first he thought he was rich. Still, he died the way he wanted, with no damn debt."

Ronnie indexes the trigger, the *rat-a-tat-tat* jerk of gunfire chiselling his shoulder, circular holes ripping the targets. Empty brass piles on on the brittle earth. And Ronnie yells, "You mean he died with nothing, not even his dignity."

Ronnie thumbs the clip release of the smoking AR-15, and Kenny says, "Compared to the millions the buyers make from their supercenters they build, I agree, it's an insult. Especially to those generations of family who lived from that land with nothing more to show than Polaroid picture albums, age spots and a broke-down body before they took residence in the dirt." Kenny pauses, steps forward, raises his Glock, two-hands it and walks to within 20 feet of the drums. Rapid-fires the pistol. When it's empty, he turns, walks back to Ronnie and says, "Here's one for you. Three years ago, the Walmart in Clarksville, Indiana was the number-three profit maker in the world."

Ronnie smirks, presses a brass-filled magazine into his rifle and says, "Know what I say, some clever son of a bitch needs to trim the fat from these I-like-taking-it-in-the-ass-lazy-as-f#ck Americans. Just go into that superstore like Jesse f#cking James, full tilt, with enough armed men—when one of them armoured trucks comes in for their morning haul, bring the blaze, plant one in that sexist GM's belly while creating complete and total havoc in everyone's little world-retina-view. Say 'Looky here, motherf#ckers,, we's sick of your control, taking all of our other choices away and leaving us with only one. Oh, and we's taking your loot.'"

Kenny passes Ronnie, whose anger has created slobber in the corners of his mouth. He goes to a large rough-cut wooden table he built with a canopy over the top, where Wilbur and Hollis stand listening while readying their .45s. Kenny drops the clip from his Glock onto the table where boxes of .45-calibre shells are stacked and says, "It could be done, done by us." Kenny pauses, thumbs bullets into his clip and finishes with "I say we do it."

RONNIE FLIPS A CANOF DIP FROM HIS POCKET."THIS IS A FUCKING WAKE-UP CALL. TO EVERYONE THAT'S FORGOTTEN ABOUT INDEPENDENCE."

Ronnie wipes spittle from his mouth, busts up laughing. "Get the f#ck out of here, you was a pig, big brother, was ole Johnny motherf#cking Law for, what, 20-some years? Me, I'm just some disgruntled American war vet, running my f#cking chops, venting my frustrations with the 'this land is my land, this land is your land' that's become a sweltering pile of horseshit."

Kenny says, "I was a cop. I ain't no more 'cause I's fed up dealing with a buncha educated and uneducated idiots who was running the county into the soil. Way I see it, problem we have in this day and age is the same dumb shits that govern our employment are of the same mentality of those running our country into the goddamned ground at the general population's expense. This ain't just happening here, it's happening all over the country and no one has done nothing about it."

Hollis and Wilbur look at each other, purse their lips, smile and say, "You're right."

Ronnie holds a shit-eating grin and says, "Okay, Mr. I's Fed Up, then how you proclaim we'd do it? Hell, why would we do it?"

Kenny says, "The question is, why wouldn't we do it? We do it to open some eyes, to make a stand, start a movement——"

"A movement?" Hollis interrupts. "You mean like all them Occupy Wall Street shit birds who wasted four years taking gender studies and was surprised they couldn't get jobs? Then wasted tax dollars by camping out in cities, trashing them, getting drunk and stoned and raping women?"

Kenny says, "No, them f#cktards wanted free shit because they thought they was entitled to it. I'm talking about like-minded people, those who've worked, dirtied their hands, watched the system fail. And we'd be getting the big-dick marker out to say we've had enough of your ways. We'd do it smart, methodical and as cold-blooded as need be to assure we pull it off. Everyone would be expendable. We scope out every obstacle. And create our own diversions. We hit their shit first, then we wait for the dominoes to fall and do the deed."

Ronnie says, "Smart and cold-blooded I get, but that don't give much intel to your way of thinking."

Kenny tells him, "You were in the military, all three of you were soldiers, I was a cop. We all been trained to go into the field of battle. Who do we depend upon when the guns begin blazing, when a suspect flees or shit doubles down into a backfire?"

Ronnie says, "The men in my unit, we're a team, we cater to one another, no man left behind."

Kenny says, "Bull's-f#cking-eye! So we remove the ones that depend on one another from the equation, we scramble their shit. All that's left is us to rain down with our will."

Ronnie smirks, "And how we go about the removal?"

Kenny says, "We'd need explosives,

dynamite, C-4, some disposable vehicles, burner phones and guns."

Ronnie looks to Wilbur and Hollis "What'll you guys think of your big bad ex-Dirty-f#cking-Harry brother over here talking shit?"

Hollis says, "Goddammit, we're in. Tired of the suit-and-tie guys, the union reps that act like they's doing the best they can do for us, day after day, and treating us like we're lower forms of life after we done give our time to Uncle Sam."

And Wilbur chimes in, "I'm sure our cousins down at 135 Auto can get us some throwaway vehicles. Hell, I bet they'd wanna be in on it."

Hollis says, "And as far as explosives, owner down at the gun range in Kentucky got major connects."

Kenny says, "Rumor is he's tied to the KKK and Aryans. Heard through the grapevine the ATF has been getting a lot of buzz on him, but he's smart, knows how to deter the heat, ain't been caught yet."

Hollis asks, "What about the innocent folk?"

Kenny says, "Innocent folk? Shit, all people are concerned about anymore is what's going on with reality TV, or who movie stars are poking is poking or what sex video they's filming, who's got a bigger smartphone, or when the next goddamned *Iron Man* movie is coming out. No one cares about the soldiers, the law enforcement, firefighters, nurses, farmers, the working class, those that care for everyone else. People in this day and age could tell you who won last year's Oscar before they could tell you who was the last vice president. This ain't about being innocent anyway, innocence is expendable. Hell, it ain't even about the f#cking money as far as I'm concerned."

Hollis asks, "What's it about, then?"

Kenny tells him, "Money is secondary. There would be cash, but you gotta remember, in this day and age plastic rules. They'll think it's about money, but it ain't."

Ronnie flips a can of Kodiak dip from his pocket, nestles a chew into his lip, cuts in with "This is a f#cking wake-up call. To everyone that's forgotten about independence." Pausing to spit, he says, "It's about the corporations stealing the rural blind, buying farmland to build their superstores, creating jobs that just take the money right back in. It's about that sad sack who tells you what to do at your job every day when he don't even know how to do your job and don't wanna know, don't even care about you, it's about what everyone has lost and don't even know it. Their salvation."

Kenny says, "It's about things that can't be said. It's about folks being blind, being satisfied with the same old shit, over and over, never taking a stand. Instead they tell themselves it'll get better, but it never does."

Wilbur says, "I know I's sick and tired of being told thanks for serving our country every time someone sees me wearing a cap with my rank and the war I fought in or some sad sap that knows me. I didn't serve our country—I fought in a war that others were too damn weak and stupid to fight. Shitting in one hand and wiping with the other."

Kenny says, "And they still are. Look at us, we pull out and go right back into another war to bomb ISIS."

BLACK SMOKE BILLOWS UP INTO THE SKY. OFFICERS SLIDE INTO THEIR CRUISERS, TURN ON SIRENS AND BARK TYRES OUT OF THE LOT.

Hollis joins in, "And the president is talking about the U.S. training rebels to fight them. Didn't we do the same shit with bin Laden, didn't the CIA train he and his people to fight the Russians in Afghanistan? Look what happened all them years later, 9/11. And we got North Korea and Syria on deck."

Ronnie shakes his head. "I served two tours for that war. F#cked-up situation, don't no one ever learn by they past mistakes."

Wilbur says, "I got the point, but we're losing the thread. If we gonna do it, other than how, the next question would be, when?"

Kenny stands in thought for a moment, clicks a full clip into his Glock. "We do it on the biggest goddamn money day they got besides the Christmas sale. Black Friday."

The brothers' eyes meet with evil grins.

CUT TO THE PRACTICE DRIVES, always in a different car. Kenny and his brothers sit in the Walmart lot, taking notes. Scoping out the entrances and exits. The 15 cameras that watch from the roof. The numbered parking rows and which are closest to get in and get out. The pickup times for the Brinks armoured trucks, how many guards, what they carry. How much time they take to pick up the cash and leave.

Ronnie says, "Look at all these rocky-road-eating motherf#ckers. Still got yesterday's gravy on their chins."

After a month of study, they have it down. Kenny reviews a list of bullet points. "I know they hire a minimum of 10 off-duty cops on Black Friday. They have radio contact with each other and all-door access to get from place to place without fighting the crowd. To remove them, we blow up a police cruiser in the department's parking lot. That'll cause some of the security to leave. This'll alert the fire department. When they leave the firehouse, we hit it, blow one of the fire engines left behind, 'cause they won't bring all their rigs. At the same time, we blow the big water tower. Fire department will say f#ck the police, go to save their own shit. But there won't be no water pressure."

Wilbur asks, "Who's blowing the cruiser, the fire rig and the water tower?"

Kenny tells him, "Marty and Kraut. They're scouting as we speak. Getting their routes down."

Wilbur asks, "And we're——"

Kenny tells him, "Doing the robbery."

Ronnie cuts in, "Okay, then what about Brinks?"

Kenny says, "Brinks doesn't monitor shit, they won't have a clue. For them it'll be business as usual. We hit the guards as they exit. This has to be a perfect domino effect to work. You need to be backed in the first spot in row 11."

Wilbur questions, "How the hell we do that?"

"Get here early and get the spot. Wait. When Ronnie and me come out, you gotta come barreling to us. Hollis, by this time you've taken out the north entrance, creating mass hysteria. You'll be down the walk, help with the guards. When we get in the van, we'll have 60 seconds to get to the other end. Hang a left onto Pacer Drive, one minute to the next stop, where we hang a right onto Corydon Ramsey Road, then speed down and hang a left onto Quarry Road

Every available law enforcement unit's gonna be south; we go northwest, keep to the back roads." >>

"Where do we switch?"

"Talked with Marty and Kraut. They drop a swap vehicle at the old church out off of 337 night before. When they's done lighting up Harrison County, they'll do the same as us, take the back roads to the old church. We meet and leave the cash and a big f#cking surprise for later."

"Surprise?"

"Like we discussed, this ain't about the money. It's about a movement."

Ronnie tells him, "Fine, where we gonna go after all is said and done?"

Kenny tells him, "Underground. Way this works, we can't have no f#ck-ups, we're in the watermark of technology, everything is traceable. Some trailer-trash motherf#cker pulls out their smartphone, it'll be on YouTube, go viral and every major news channel in the country will see us. We need disguises."

Ronnie laughs. "That's easy fake beards, camo makeup."

Kenny says, "And there's the phone call."

Ronnie asks, "Phone call?"

Kenny tells him, "Yeah, this is gonna be bigger than any of us. Whoever makes the call won't be able to use things like voice chat or a cellphone no more. They'll bring in the feds, they'll have voice recognition, use Patriot Act rules. Which means all bets are off and lawful tactics are suspended for homegrown terrorists. 'Cause that's how we'll be labelled."

CUT BACK TO BLACK

FRIDAY, 10:02 A.M. The Brinks driver flips through paperwork for his next stop when three ground-quaking explosions detonate within moments of one another. Wide-eyed, he sees smoke mushrooming to the south, then to the east. "What in the f#ck?" Through his front windshield and out his side mirrors he watches off-duty cops run from the exits and out into the lot, where patrons stand mannequin-stiff, staring at the black smoke billowing up into the sky. Officers slide into their cruisers, turn on sirens and bark tires out of the lot.

Kenny storms into Walmart's south entrance, bumping through the mad rush of customers. He putties a square of C-4 on the wall inside. Ronnie pushes through the crowd and into the store. Snaps two 20-minute road flares, tosses them into the men's clothing area not 30 feet from the doors. People begin yelling.

Turning around, he sees the Brinks guards are already out the exit, carrying satchels of cash. Kenny shadows them; Ronnie not far behind. Gilbert, the GM with the 1970s porn moustache, cuts down the last cashier's aisle, beads of moisture plastering his piglet features. He tries to cut off Ronnie while barking orders over his radio, but there's no response but static, his security is MIA.

Ronnie smiles. The north entrance detonates. The GM drops the radio, palms each of his ears, bambone-knees crack on the tiled floor. Tears streak from his orbs as he cries, "NO!" Ronnie's mind flashes back to Afghanistan, eyes gloss over with the madness of bearded men in pyjama-like clothing firing AKs.

Kenny makes it out to the sidewalk, eyes Hollis to his left ramming his matte black 45-calibre Kimber into the left temple of guard number one's skull. Kenny takes the cash bag from the guard's grip while pressing his pistol into guard number two's back, tells him, "Do anything stupid, your buddy gets graved on the sidewalk."

Behind him in the store, Gilbert begs from the floor at Ronnie, "Why're you doing this?"

Flames and smoke blossom from the clothing area. Shoppers fall to the tile, coughing. Others run, trampling bodies and shouting "Fire, fire!"

Ronnie looks down upon Gilbert, shouts, "F#ck you, sloth!" Gilbert eyes Ronnie, twists his head oddly and says, "Ronnie?" Ronnie points his pistol downward. The world around him loses its sound. He plants a silver-dollar-size hole in the GM's soft pink facade. Pulp-organ-skull-matter scatters and noise roars back into Ronnie's ears with the rush of blood to his face.

Bodies press and bump, knocking Ronnie around. He elbows, punches and feeds his pistol butt to faces. Kenny looks back into the store and hollers, "F#cking move it!"

Ronnie is busting skulls to get out the door when shots from inside ring out. He turns to the overcast of smoke that hangs like early morning fog laced with orange heat, takes a thud in the chest from some salve-faced man wearing a *Duck Dynasty* cap and yelling, "F#cking rag-headed f#ck!" He's firing a nine-millimetre handgun. Tears a patch out of Ronnie's left forearm.

Ronnie returns fire. Parts the man's shoulder, then his face, and more people are diving to the floor in holiday horror.

Out on the sidewalk, Kenny holds one of the sacks of cash, the guard yowling, "You'll never get away with——"

Ronnie's lungs huff as he runs out of Walmart. He presses his Kimber to the man's skull, tugs the trigger. Turns to the other guard, does the same. Blood colours the side of the armoured truck the shade of war.

Wilbur barks the van's tires up onto the sidewalk behind them. Ronnie steps to the armoured truck's passenger side. Points his pistol at the driver. Fires two shots. Splinters the glass and the driver's complexion.

The brothers go around the back of the Brinks truck and open the rear door, intent on grabbing more money. A guard inside combusts the air with shotgun fire. Lights up Hollis's side profile, he drops. Ronnie unloads on the guard, blowing brains and scalp all over the inside.

"Motherf#cker!"

Ronnie kneels, lifts and shoulders the mangled mess that is Hollis up and around to the van. Kenny slides the side door open. Gunshots from patrons ring out from the parking lot, dotting and dinging the van's side. Ronnie throws Hollis inside. Wilbur yells, "Holy shit! Holy shit, Hollis, they f#cking killed Hollis!"

Kenny reaches for one of the AR-15s on the van's floor, hands it to Ronnie, tells him, "Start mowing the lawn!" Ronnie shoulders the AR-

A STATE TROOPER SIRENS RED-AND-BLUE UP BESIDE THE VANF ROM NOWHERE. CAPS AROUND INTO THE OPEN DOOR. CLIPS KENNY'S RIGHT ARM.

15, creates a rainfall of splintered glass around cars and trucks. Piercing hoods and doors as he tells Kenny, "Blow the f#cking south entrance!"

Kenny pulls his phone out with one hand, grabs Ronnie by the collar with his other and jerks him backward into the van. Ronnie keeps hosing the parking lot with gunfire, spraying chaos. Kenny shouts to Wilbur, "F#cking move!"

The van swerves from the sidewalk, past the smoking north entrance strewn with debris and bodies. Kenny thumbs the centre button on his cell phone. The PHARMACY end comes apart like fresh stitches of rubble. Wilbur swerves past oncoming vehicles lost within the mass hysteria, hits buggies and patrons, who thud and bounce up over the hood. Adrenalised, Ronnie drops an empty clip from the smoking AR-15, clicks in a fresh one, looks at his brother's gory face. Starts driving scarred knuckles into the ceiling.

Wilbur hangs a hard rubber-burning left onto Pacer Drive. A state trooper sirens red-and-blue up beside the van from nowhere. Caps around into the open side door of the van. Clips the muscle of Kenny's right arm. Ronnie delivers an ice storm of gunfire onto the cop, spattering the cruiser's interior and front windshield crimson, causing the cruiser to swerve to the right and crash off the side of the road. Wilbur keeps the pedal mashed all the way to Corydon Ramsey Road, the side door still gaping, cold air glazing the men like fresh icing to a warm cake as they hit the Quarry Road. Other than a roaring engine, tyres rounding on pavement, all that can be heard is the wail of sirens channelling distance.

GO TO METAPHORS FROM THE DEAD where Wilbur's shovel pats the earthy grit over the unmarked grave of Hollis. Ronnie and Kenny stand wounded, watching. Knowing everyone is expendable, that he did not die in vain. That they'd made some noise. Opened some eyes. But they aren't done.

GO TO THE FBI leading the investigation, with everyone else—the ATF, Harrison County PD, Indiana Department of Homeland Security and the fire marshal— butting heads over jurisdiction, over "this is my backyard" bullshit because the outsiders view the locals as too podunk to be involved. Everyone wants to be the first to get that big break into how the f#ck this happened, take credit in front of the cameras.

FLASHBACK TO KENNY and his final play. Wilbur looking to Kenny, eyes blazed by red, "Now what?"

"We do as we planned. Finish this and go underground."

Ronnie's on the same page as Kenny, looks to Wilbur. "We all talked this out beforehand. This is what Hollis wanted. What we all wanted."

GO TO THE DAYS BEFORE BLACK FRIDAY, when cash is exchanged for several prepaid burner phones. Bought by a man with a fake beard, shoe-polished features, in overalls and driving a black-primered van, plates removed before entering the lot, nothing for cameras to trace. After purchasing the phones, the man gets into the van and drives down the road out of eyeshot, pulls over, puts the plates back on and drives away.

CUT TO AFTER THE EXPLOSIONS, to after the robbery, to after the burial of Hollis. To taking care of the burner phones, each used only once, the last phone used to make the brag call— the anonymous tip about the old church. Melting lead wheel weights onto the phones down at 135 Auto. Travelling down to Mauckport, tossing some of them into the Ohio River and then turning west to toss the remaining phones into the Blue River.

JUMP BACK TO THE LETTER. The starched-suited lead federal investigator gets the anonymous tip from dispatch and hauls ass out off of Highway 337 to a private blacktopped drive that leads to a greying, abandoned church nestled way back in the sticks among several hundred acres of farmland. The state police SWAT team and local PD have already arrived. The van and trucks used in the robbery and in the police car, water tower and firehouse explosions are parked in a half-circle, nose to butt, in a 30-foot-by-30-foot area.

Two Harrison County cops walk around the vans, looking under them, through the driver and passenger-side windows. The lead SWAT officer, hands gloved, gives the letter, in its envelope, to the fed. He's lean, not a hair out of line on his skull.

With the SWAT team standing around the vans, the fed asks, "Who f#cking alerted the Harrison County podunks?"

"No idea, sir." Clearing his throat, "They beat us here."

"Jesus f#cking Christ. Everything secured?" "Yes, sir."

"Those podunks touch anything?"

"No, sir."

"Any idea who owns the property?"

"No, sir, but we're searching courthouse records as we speak."

"Any signs of the responsible party?"

"No, sir, just this envelope . . . addressed to——"

"Motherf#ckers?"

"Yes, sir."

Wearing black latex gloves, the fed takes the envelope from the SWAT officer's grip, eyes it carefully. Opens it. Removes the letter. Takes in every word. Red arcs across his face; he grits his pearl teeth. Eyes dart quick when one of the Harrison County podunks yells, "Holy fucking shit, the goddamned money's inside of here, f#cking look, it's right f#cking——"

Before the fed can muster, "Don't touch a fucking thing!" the officer's right hand cups the van's passenger-side handle. Opens the door maybe a quarter inch. All that's heard is a squeaking hinge before the hidden C-4, rigged within the door panels of each vehicle, combusts the entire 30-by-30 space. Everything within pissing distance becomes a monstrous ball of flames and combustible parts. Some mechanical. Some human. All incinerated. ■

Josie Capllonch

Photographs by **BRUCE COLERO** *Text by* **SAMANTHA JACK**

About me
I'm just a Swede girl, currently travelling the world. I moved from Sydney, Australia about a year ago to travel a bit. I spend a lot of time in Los Angeles though and of course, I visit Sweden when I can.

My biggest hobby
Health and fitness. I used to work as a Personal Trainer in Sydney for a few years. I'm a real foodie and nothing beats a good red wine or champagne.

My goal
To one day have a beautiful family to take care of and spoil with love.

Who inspires me
All the people I meet around the world. Everyone you meet influences your life in one way or another.

My favourite quote
"Take the risk or lose the chance."

Turn-on
Eyes and confidence.

Turn-off
Arrogance and bad hygiene.

The perfect date
He sends me a car to a secret location, something he's planned, doesn't really matter what it is but I'd like someone that wants to impress me and will go out of his way to do so.

Girl crush
Chrissy Teigen

My favourite food
Sushi/champagne (yes, liquid diet!).

My biggest fear
Flying (even if I do so all the time).

I'm not embarrassed to say
That I love doing lingerie/nude shoots. It makes me feel sexy being in front of the camera, having all eyes on me.
For more of Josie you can follow her on instagram @josie.capllonch

JANUARY 2018

KRISTOFFERSSON WRAPS UP #CAPETOWNRX IN STYLE

A hot, fast, and dramatic two days of racing at the Killarney International Raceway on the outskirts of Cape Town marked three big things.

First up it was the FIA World Rallycross Championship's inaugural weekender in South Africa – pulling in a record crowd of 27 000 fans. Secondly, Johan Kristoffersson closed out his championship-winning season in perfect style by nailing his seventh victory of the year. And thirdly, it marked the final competition for PSRX Volkswagen Sweden and Hoonigan Racing Division ahead of Gymkhana GRiD 2017 on the 18th and 19th of November in Johannesburg.

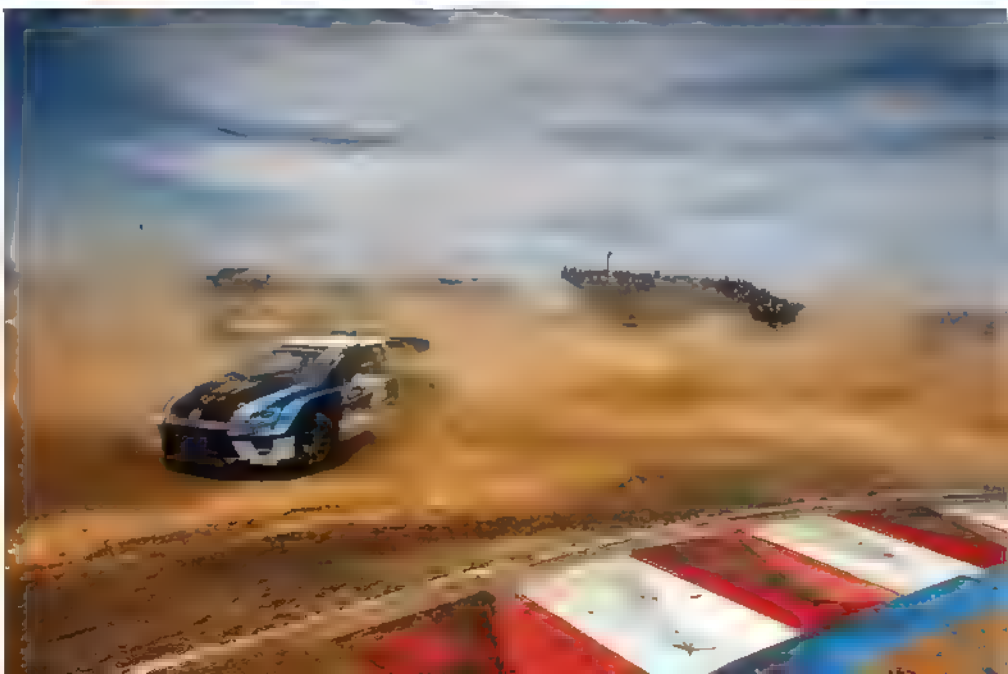
For 2017 FIA World Rallycross Champion Johan Kristoffersson in particular, things can hardly get better right now. Standing on the top step of the podium marks an astonishing 11 podiums out of 12 races this year for the 29-year-old Swede, beating his nearest championship rival, and outgoing 2016 World RX Champion, Mattias Ekström by 61 points. Putting his VW GTI Supercar to full effect in his trademark precision style, Johan again dominated proceedings on track, emerging as top qualifier in the intermediate standings after the four qualifying races, and then going on to take blistering wins in semi-final one and the event's main final. While PSRX Volkswagen team boss and driver Petter Solberg narrowly missed out on making it a dream 1-2 championship finish, he can console himself that fourth position in South Africa further adds another solid haul of points to confirm his team's undisputed top position in the Teams' Championship.

Hoonigan Racing Division's Ken Block and Andreas Bakkerud suffered a galling weekend, finishing 8th and 7th overall. Although both drivers qualified well, placing 6th and 5th respectively at the intermediate standings, success in the finals proved elusive in the pair's final event together in the FIA World Rallycross Championship. Head Hoonigan in Charge Ken Block, in particular, put in a superb last performance at the South African circuit – leading the overnight standings as top qualifier at the end of day one. Rolling into day two, Block kept his foot on the gas retaining a top-six position in the qualifying standings after another two races.

Unfortunately, heavy damage sustained during the battle for the lead of Block's semi-final race meant his Ford Focus RSRX had shed a significant amount of its front bodywork, and at the subsequent post-race weigh-in, the car was judged to be underweight by race officials. Cruelly this also meant that despite Ken's awesome performance on track, he was disqualified from the race and eliminated from progressing to the weekend's main final.

If all that action wasn't enough, the crowds were kept on the edge of their seats in between the racing with 23-time World Record holder Terry Grant and South African hero drifter Jason Webb laying down incredible tyre-slaying demos.

Johan Kristoffersson – PSRX Volkswagen World



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HOONIGAN RACING DIVISION

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RX Team Sweden – 1st
"This season has been just incredible. I can't believe what we have achieved. Again, I have to thank Petter and all of the team – together we have been so strong this year. I thought this was possible when we talked before the season started, but to deliver like this is amazing. This is a fantastic way to end the season, this seventh win means I have more than 50 percent of the victories."

Petter Solberg – PSRX Volkswagen World RX Team Sweden – 4th
"Of course, it's a little bit disappointing not to take the silver, but just look at where we are with this team that didn't even exist this time in 2016! I am so proud of what we have done. Johan has broken so many records this year and the whole team - everybody in PSRX Volkswagen Sweden - has worked and played so hard, this weekend and this year is because of them and I can't thank them all enough. Mattias Ekström is a tough racer and we know it's going to be a big battle and it was. The end of the semi-final when we were so close together was just incredible and the same in the final. I tried everything, but it wasn't possible to come past him. But it's OK. We have enough gold for one year!"

Andreas Bakkerud – Hoonigan Racing Division – 7th
"I had a moment in the car driving back to the paddock, when I was thinking about what had been the high and low points over the past two incredible years. For sure 2016 in Hell, Norway, where we had our first win, and I dominated the whole weekend. The biggest disappointment I guess is that we haven't really figured out how to consistently keep our pace fast. This weekend was a perfect example of that – how we can go from being P1 and P2 in practise, then top during the first qualifying, and then drop further back on day two. If we could have figured out how to maintain our pace during the weekend, we would have been able to fight for titles this season."

Ken Block – Hoonigan Racing Division – 8th
"So, my race day went awesome yesterday - and I was on my way to starting the final in fourth place after some really tough qualifying and semi battles. Unfortunately, I lost a lot of bodywork whilst finishing second in my semi-final race. So, when my car hit the scales after the semi, it came in underweight - and therefore, I got disqualified because my race car was "too light" (lolwut!) Very lame way to end my FIA World Rallycross season, especially since I was in a podium-contending position!" ■

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LD RALLYCROSS CHAMPIONSHIP
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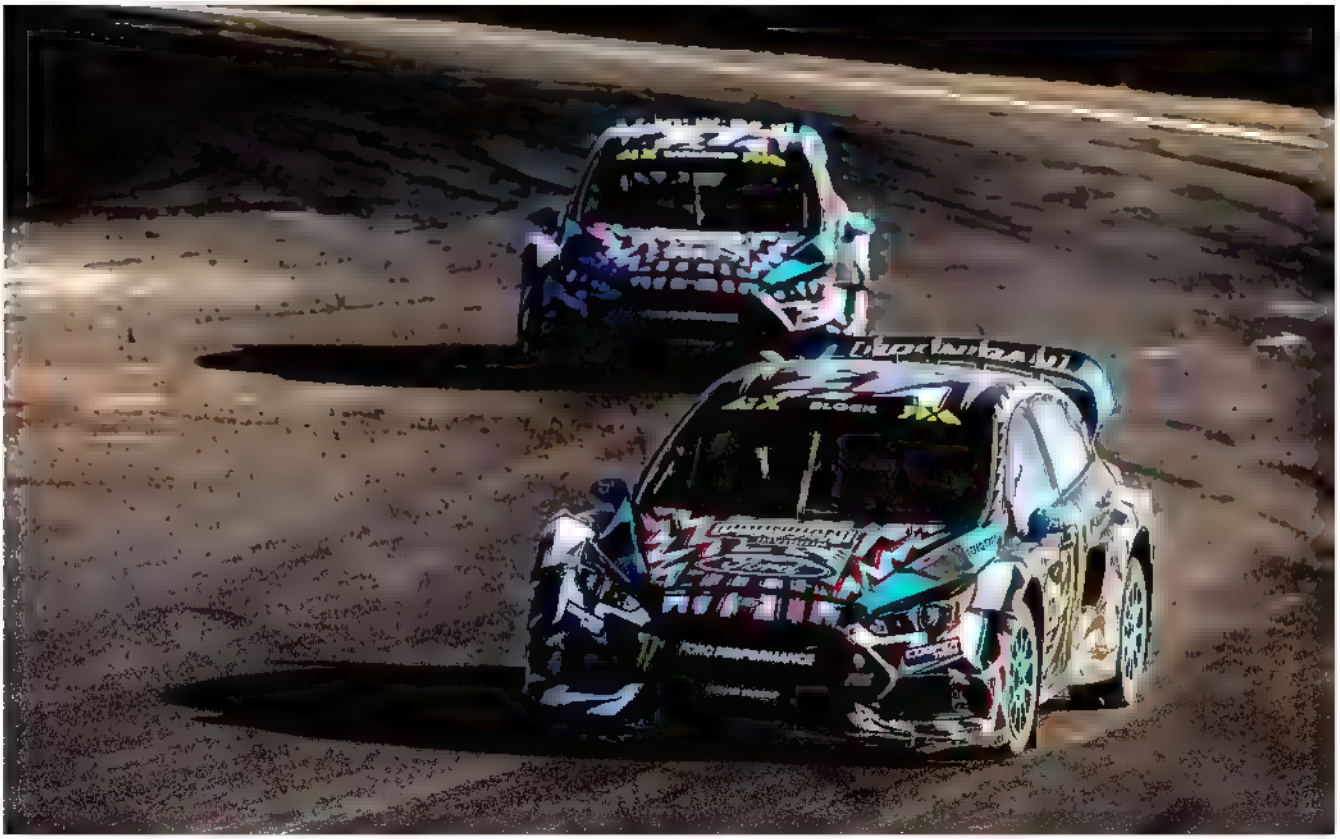

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www.TerryGrant.com
MONSTER
ENERGY

11
BAUHAUS
PENNZOIL

3
MONSTER ENERGY
BAUHAUS
PENNZOIL

Kayleigh
Swenson
JANUARY 2014

About me
I was born in San Antonio Texas, currently in Orange County, California, USA. I am a big-time fitness buff. I grew up with a bodybuilder for a father and a fitness model mom, so I was surrounded by the lifestyle. I practically grew up in Gold's Gym Venice. I am kind of a nerd. I love playing my Xbox and watching gory horror movies. Also, I'm a fan of muscle cars, my Dodge Challenger is my baby. They call me Viking Barbie because I'm Scandinavian tall, statuesque, and tough but glamorous.

My hobbies and interests
Working out, relaxing with a good flick and helping other people find sobriety. I love all things psychology related, and hanging out with my few close friends.

Turn-on
Loyalty, kindness, honesty and humility.

Turn-off
Arrogance, rude people, closed-mindedness and greed.

The perfect date
Working out together, ordering takeout and curling up with a good movie.

My favourite food
French fries.

My biggest fear
My biggest fears are regret or losing someone I love.

One destination I'd love to visit
Ireland.

For more on Kayleigh you can follow her on Instagram @viking barbie and on Facebook @vikingbarbie1

Bra: 34DD
Waist: 64cm
Hips: 91cm
Height: 173m
Weight: 61kg
Eye Colour: Green/grey

Calvin Klein
Calvin Klein
Calvin Klein
Calvin Klein
Calvin Klein

Calvin Klein

ZERO DARK DIRTY

With the most dangerous combat positions opening to women, an age-old question resurfaces: How do we deal with sexual attraction—and harassment—on the front lines?

Late into her deployment to Iraq, Lieutenant Laura Westley, along with some of her fellow soldiers, decided to go skinny-dipping in the pool at one of Saddam Hussein's palaces. They were all young, naked, trained to peak physical condition—and away from the prying eyes of commanders. As she swam, Westley began to fool around with a male soldier in her unit.

Westley recounts this scene in her memoir, *War Virgin*. "Screw this good Christian girl image and marrying my high school sweetheart," she writes. "I just lived through a war.... It's time me to free myself. And man, was I horny."

When Westley first went to war, she was a deeply naive virgin thrust into a unit filled with testosterone-fuelled young men. The experience changed her, and when she returned to civilian life, she started working to foster open discussion about the intersection of sex and military life. "I don't want what happened to me to happen to other people," she says. "For them to get into a dangerous war situation and then to be like, 'Wow, what are these feelings?'"

Recent revelations about male marines sharing nude photos of female comrades—secretly and without the women's consent—have embroiled the Pentagon in controversy and opened a window on to the sex lives of men and women in uniform. But the U.S. military's uneasy relationship with sex goes back much further. And as ubiquitous as sex is in military life, the institution seems woefully underequipped to talk about it.

War Virgin author Lieutenant Laura Westley.

PLAYBOY spoke with several veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (some of whom preferred to speak anonymously) about their experiences navigating the fraught sexual dynamics of service in today's armed forces. Through a diverse assortment of voices and ranks, an outline emerges of a national conversation that could fundamentally change how both women and men participate in the military.

•••

In 2013, the Obama administration ended the U.S. military's longstanding "combat exclusion" policy that barred women from serving in units whose primary mission was ground combat: infantry, armour, artillery and special operations. The five service branches had until 2016 to open all occupations to women.

It was a controversial move. In January 2016 Republican congressman and Marine Corps veteran Duncan Hunter accused Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, a vocal proponent of full gender integration, of "social meddling," calling him "a greater threat to the Marine Corps than ISIS." During the 2016 campaign season, several candidates criticised the policy. Nevertheless, while politicians campaigned, troops trained. In December 2016, the Army reported that women were qualifying for combat jobs at roughly twice the rate commanders had predicted.

James "Chaos" Mattis, the retired Marine Corps general who became the Trump administration's defence secretary, had originally voiced scepticism about opening ground combat jobs to women. But his confirmation hearing reflected a different attitude. "I have no plan to oppose women serving in any aspect in our military," Mattis told senators. "In 2003 I had hundreds of marines who happened to be women serving in my 23,000-person Marine division. I put them right into the front lines alongside everyone else. If someone brings me a problem, I'll look at it. But I'm not coming in looking for problems."

Mattis's statements point to an inescapable reality. Throughout all the years of war since 9/11, women have already seen combat. They have flown combat air missions, driven on bomb-infested roads and served as military police — jokingly nicknamed the "co-ed infantry" post-9/11 because of their frequent use in counterinsurgency roles.

Military jobs aren't like other jobs. Troops live and work together 24/7. They often cuddle in the field when it's cold, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. They have to trust and depend on one another with their lives, and that sort of loyalty can lead to other, more confusing feelings. "It's a level of intimacy you will probably never experience again in your life," Westley explains. "I've struggled with this as a civilian—like, are my friendships as meaningful as they were in the military because we're not on some crazy focused mission together, risking our lives?" Some veterans have argued that, once women are added to the equation, these dynamics can threaten unit effectiveness. "It can shift the focus of doing the job if everybody's trying to get laid. I know it sounds incredibly true," Green Beret turned author Jack Murphy told NBC in 2013 about the prospect of women in combat units. "Throwing a woman in the middle of a team like that is just going to make the>>

ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN METZ

entire team useless, because in the end there will be so much infighting, so much drama."

A similar argument was mounted against repealing the Clinton-era "don't ask, don't tell" policy that banned openly gay people from serving. But when DADT was finally repealed, it notably failed to cause a collapse in military readiness. In fact, prior to repeal, some commanders complained that the policy had forced the termination of several military linguists, depriving units of their skills and knowledge.

But female infantrymen make for an even moreradical — and noticeable — change. "I don't think the burden should be on women to not be there," Westley says. "The answer is to have an open dialogue and learn how to deal with it."

Kate Germano, a retired Marine Corps lieutenant colonel who has had her own brush with controversy in this area, takes it a step further. "If we say having women in those units would disrupt male camaraderie and there's nothing to be done about that except not having women in those units, we take the onus off leaders and basically don't hold them accountable for leading these men and women," she says."And I find that to be tragic."

•••

Germano was a fierce proponent of holding women to high standards while in the Marines. She made headlines in 2015 when commanders removed her from her post at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island as the officer in charge of training female recruits. Commanders alleged she was "abusive." She acknowledged that she could be tough but insisted she was no tougher than her male counterparts.

"Integration is going to succeed or fail based on how receptive we are to redefining what a warrior is and what they look like," Germano says. During her tenure, rifle qualification rates for women climbed from around 72 percent to just under 92 percent.

Retired Green Beret Scott Satterlee, who was among the first U.S. troops to enter Afghanistan after 9/11, believes sexual tension could become an issue but argues that a basic level of maturity, dialogue and trust should solve that. After all, we're talking about what's supposed to be the world's most professional military force. "If someone is tough enough to go through Special Forces selection or Ranger School, she's earned a shot," he says.

•••

The story of the sexual misadventures of military personnel is as old as war itself. During World War II a common refrain in the U.K. was that American G.I.s were "overpaid, oversexed and over here." During the Vietnam War, Playmate Jo Collins visited troops in the field and even handed out copies of PLAYBOY. The Centerfoldsweredisplayedprominentlyinbunkers and in fighting positions—and were often treasured during soldiers' "personal time." In those years, the military was unapologetically a man's world, with women mostly relegated to supporting roles as nurses and clerks. But as they began to take on larger roles, in jobs ranging from fighter pilots to intelligence gatherers, women gradually became peers.

With this change came a more conservative position on sex. In 1993 the Air Force ordered that all aircraft art be "gender neutral," ending a decades-long tradition of sexy pinup designs. During the early days of the war on terror, commanders issued the infamous General Order Number One. It laid out rules all troops were expected to abide by during deployment, including bans on alcohol, sex and pornography. It proved difficult to enforce. Service members smuggled booze and sometimes hard drugs with more frequency than a lot of officials would care to admit. And of course some of them were having sex.

"When the leadership turns a blind eye to it, it gets out of hand," Germano says. "In the military we have an obligation to stamp that stuff out, but not from a conservative Christian perspective. We have an obligation to stamp out inappropriate relationships

"NO FEMALE GENERALS SPOKE OUT AGAINST MARINES UNITED. WHAT DOES THAT SAY ABOUT OUR CULTURE?"

Above: U.S. soldiers visit a swimming pool at Camp Victory, Baghdad, in 2006, retired Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Kate Germano.

because they disrupt trust in the unit. But we need to take the shame out of it." Both the mores and the blind spots shift when harassment rears its head.

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The Pentagon has had to weather criticism surrounding a series of high-profile sex scandals and alarming rates of sexual assault. It's not a problem unique to the military—college rape statistics suggest a wider societal problem—but military cases have generated considerably more controversy. And servicewomen, whether they like it or not, are at the centre of the conversation.

•••

The Pentagon has attempted several remedies. One is the Army's Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention program, better known as SHARP.

The program has been praised for giving survivors of assault and rape better resources, including specially trained advocates to fight for them. But some troops have a dimmer take on it. Several women told PLAYBOY that SHARP is good at telling troops what's not acceptable but doesn't address how to deal with what may be natural or even healthy feelings. "It just makes you feel bad about sex. It makes it awkward, and it makes you not want to talk about it," says Sarah, an Army reservist.

All the veterans PLAYBOY talked to agreed that rape and assault should be dealt with as severely as possible, but some women said they would like to see a more nuanced approach to sexual harassment—some of which they say is likely unintentional. It's an opinion that may surprise women's advocates. "Give a soldier an opportunity to apologise and correct the behaviour and to learn from it and grow", Westley argues. "You're asking them to do crazy things and put their life on the line. Why not pay more attention to their development as human beings?"

But some forms of harassment are considerably more sinister than others.

In March 2017, the Marine Corps announced it would be investigating members of a Facebook group, Marines United, that had exchanged nude pictures of servicewomen without their consent. "They're on completely different levels," Westley says, comparingMarines United with other forms of harassment. "To the degree in which the victim is violated, there's no comparison."

Many of the photos were taken and sent consensually at first. Sending nude photos is increasingly common among young military couples, as frequent deployments and travel mean long stretches of time apart. Modern technology helps close that gap. But once they'd fallen into the wrong hands, the photos were shared online without the subjects' consent. From there, the images were kept in an online database that also contained individual women's names, ranks and duty stations. Several women reported they had been the victims of stalking after the photos surfaced. Marines United started to share the photos soon after the first female infantry marines officially reported for duty, in January 2017.

Perhaps the most damning part of the scandal is the fact that it's not the first instance of online harassment within the military community; commanders have known about the problem for years. In 2013, other military-centric Facebook groups, such as Just the Tip of the Spear and F'n Wook, gained infamy for publicly denigrating female troops. Despite complaints and press coverage, brass took little action.

"It's like everyone wants to ignore it until it blows up," says Germano. "And even when it blows up, we don't do anything about it unless the media or some outside light shines on it and we're forced to. No female generals spoke out against Marines United. What does that say about how messed up our culture is?"

•••

The debate over women in combat isn't close to being over. But regardless of whether or not they go as official combat troops, women will continue to serve together with men in dangerous places, doing dangerous things. It seems likely the pendulum will continue to swing between puritanical rules and blind oversight until what Westley calls the "really uncomfortable conversations about men and women, war and how we relate to one another" begin in earnest. ■

JACKET: ZARA R1 099;
T-SHIRT: MR PRICE R49

IN &

If you're the kind of man who's always on the go, then you'll want comfortable clothing that can take you from casual Friday in the office to your favourite rooftop function. Check out these easy to throw on looks to help you cruise through the summer in complete comfort and style.

By **CHARELLE JOHNSON** *Photography by* **KIRSTEN HO** *Grooming by* **ALEXIA CHARILOU**

OUT

JEANS: COTTON ON, R599.

JACKET: ZARA R1 099,
WHITE T-SHIRT: MR PRICE R49;
BLUE T-SHIRT: LE COQ SPORTIF R449,
JEANS: COTTON ON R599;
TRAINERS: SUPERDRY R1 849

SUNGLASSES: PRADA at WATCH REPUBLIC R5 890

JACKET: ZARA R899,
T-SHIRT: MR PRICE R49,
SHOES: FILLING PIECES at HYDRAULICs R4790,
JEANS: COTTON ON R649

PANTS: COTTON ON R499;
SHOES: FILING PIECES at HYDRAULICS R4 990

Anastasia DOLL

Photography by **BRUCE COLERO**

Bra: 34DD

Waist: 66cm

Hips: 91cm

Height: 165m

Weight: 50kg

Eye colour: Grey

About me
My name is Anastasia and I'm 22 years old. I was born in the South of France. I was a student studying communication before I began modelling around the age of 18.

Hobbies
I like taking great care of myself. I practise boxing and fitness and I also love travelling and shopping.

Career
I would like to continue in the glamorous modelling industry and hopefully make the Playboy cover some day.

Inspiration
Angelina Jolie

My favourite quote
"Never a failure, always a lesson."

Turn-on
An enterprising and self-confident man excites me a lot.

Turn-off
Men who do nothing with their life.

Girl crush
Angelina Jolie

The perfect date
On a paradise island.

My favourite food
Sushi.

My biggest fear
To be disfigured, I sometimes have nightmares about it.

One destination I would love to visit
I would love to visit Tokyo.

Follow Anastasia on Instagram @anastasiiadoll or on Twitter @AnastasiaDoll96

Playboy Advisor

Columnist Bridget Phetasy on how not to be a f#ckboy. Plus: advice for lovers sparring over politics; the upside of a celibate girlfriend

Q: *I was recently dumped by a woman I met at a bar near our campus. We dated for about two months, went out together a lot and had some pretty damn amazing sex, so the dumping came as a surprise. She broke it off via text, saying, "Sorry, but I can't keep dating a f#ckboy". I've heard women use that word in a bunch of different ways. (Even my female friends disagree about what my ex meant by it.) So what the hell is a f#ckboy?More important, how do I make sure I'm not one?*

A: You're right to be confused. There seem to be as many definitions of f#ckboy as there are English-speaking millennials. Overall, it has become a catchall phrase women use to label single men who exhibit all kinds of failings. Urban Dictionary has more than 600 user-generated definitions that attempt to explain the term. The most popular is "a person who is a weakass pussy that ain't about shit." In short, f#ckboy is a pejorative, with a definition that changes with every person who uses it.

Originally I thought the term was a synonym for booty call. I used it loosely to refer to whichever man I was using for his dick at the time. But then my last booty call, offended that I'd called him a f#ckboy, schooled me. "You ain't even using it right," he said. When I asked him to explain, he said he wasn't a f#ckboy because he wasn't a pushover. Turns out, the idea that a f#ckboy isn't his own man is an important differentiator from a booty call.

Couple that with the prevailing notion that a f#ckboy is exactly that: a boy. My friend Marisa defines one as "a lame-ass dude whose male friends' misogynistic opinions run his life." My friend Miranda says, "Any boy who tries to portray himself as a man but has no manly properties is a f#ckboy. For instance, someone who lets a woman pay for everything or is not up-front and honest about his intentions." Amber describes f#ckboys as men "who are going to tell you what you want to hear because they just want to get in your pants. He's not the kind of guy you get serious with because he's so delusional that you can't trust him."

After diving deeper, then, it seems a f#ckboy is part pushover, part womanising sociopath. Here are some simple guidelines you can follow if you want to avoid being put in that category:

1. Do what you promise you're going to do and text when you say you're going to text. Don't flake and then slide into her DMs later.

2. Be present. Classic f#ckboy behaviour is being glued to your phone when you're on a date but unresponsive to her texts when you're apart.

3. Don't beg for nudes.

4. If you like a woman, take her out in public and introduce her to your friends.

5. Misogynistic and homophobic behaviour are red flags. Phrases like bros before hos belong in the 1990s. Leave them there. Evolve your gender.

6. If you have no intention of being in a relationship, be honest. Find yourself a f#ckgirl. (They're out there.)

7. If you vape, brah, you're probably a f#ckboy. No matter how many definitions and opinions exist, this much is true: We women know a f#ckboy when we see one. If the woman you were dating called you a f#ckboy, she probably had a pretty good reason.

Q: *I've been on three out-of-this-world dates with someone I met at a friend's party. On our last date, things started getting hot, so I asked if she wanted to go to my bedroom. She declined, saying she'd just started a course of celibacy. For 90 days. I'm not sure I'm ready to commit to someone for three months without sex. Should I stay, or should I go?*

A: It depends on what you want out of this. If you're not looking for a relationship, get out. Why bother waiting to get your rocks off in the age of swiping? But if you want a relationship based on more than just sex (and it sounds like you do), I'd say she's worth the wait. Remember, you don't have to be celibate just because she is. It's all about being open, communicative and honest early on. If you're up-front with her about the fact that you're seeing other women, you're allowed to have sex with them—at least in my eyes. In the meantime, you can still date your abstinent lady friend, get to know her better and let the anticipation build. But don't give the impression you're all about her while you're shagging other honeys. That will just set you up for trouble later on. If she's cool with it, now is the perfect time to have your cake and eat it too.

Q: *I'm dating a hardcore a hard core Republican who is annoyingly pro-President Donald Trump, whereas I'm still devastated by the November election. It's putting a strain on our relationship. Any advice?*

A: If you can't let go of your loss for the sake of love—or discuss politics like mature adults and reach an understanding as to why she voted for Trump — I suggest ending it before she's the mother of your deplorable kids.

Q: *The woman I'm seeing doesn't want to go down on me. When I ask why, she simply says she's never liked it. What should I do? This has become a major hangup in our sex life.*

A: Run. Get out. Abort. Just kidding! (Kind of.) First things first: Do you go down on her? If you don't, this question doesn't even deserve a response. I'm going to assume you do go down on her; in that case, it's time for a cost-benefit analysis of your relationship. How important are blowjobs to you? I know a lot of women who hate giving head. I jokingly tell them, "Men love blowjobs more than they love you." How important is she to you? Could she be "the one"? Is this the only thing that's lacking? And if so, are you willing to live without blowjobs for the rest of your monogamous life? It's time to be brutally honest with yourself. If it's an itch you really need scratched, you'll eventually get it scratched somewhere else—outside the relationship. When it comes to dating, one of my rules of thumb is this: Do everything in your power now to avoid being a douchebag later. If you're both at the height of feeling the feels, it's worth a conversation. But understand, women hate going down on guys for a multitude of reasons, whether it's because they have a sensitive gag reflex or because it makes them feel degraded. If she's adamant about not going down, don't push it. Instead, realise it may be time to move on to someone who shares more of your interests.

Q: *After a long winter of being single, I'm eager to meet someone new. But dating apps don't work for me, and in my experience, it's hard to approach a woman in a bar when she's surrounded by friends. Is there such a thing as a good pickup line?*

A: First, you're doing it backwards. In my opinion, you should break up in the spring and shack up in the fall. Enjoy some summer flings and settle down only when winter's long, cold nights are upon us. But on to your actual question. I'm not going to lie: You're in a tough position. Dating apps have killed the meet-cute and made it increasingly hard to find opportunities to start conversations with women in public. In fact, the pickup line is such a dying art — in person and online (a 2016 Oxford Internet Institute study found that 49percent of allmessages sent ondatingappslikeTindergounanswered)—that leading with a straightforward, friendly introduction may cause you to be mistaken for a creep. That said, if you're determined to go at it the old-fashioned way, know that there's no surefire pickup line that works every time. Women can smell phoniness and packaged one-liners from a mile away, so evaluate every woman and situation on a case-by-case basis. A man once picked me up in a coffee shop with a brilliant card trick; another time, a man I frequently saw at the dog park said "We have to stop meeting like this" as we cleaned up our dogs' shit. It was hilarious and endearing. The success rate of cold-calling women in person is based 10 percent on what you say and 90 percent on how you say it. Instead of asking "Can I buy you a drink?"—which assumes a lot—a better question may be "What are you drinking?" Timing and confidence are everything. You got this.

ILLUSTRATION BY ZOHAR LAZAR

READY, AIM, FIRE

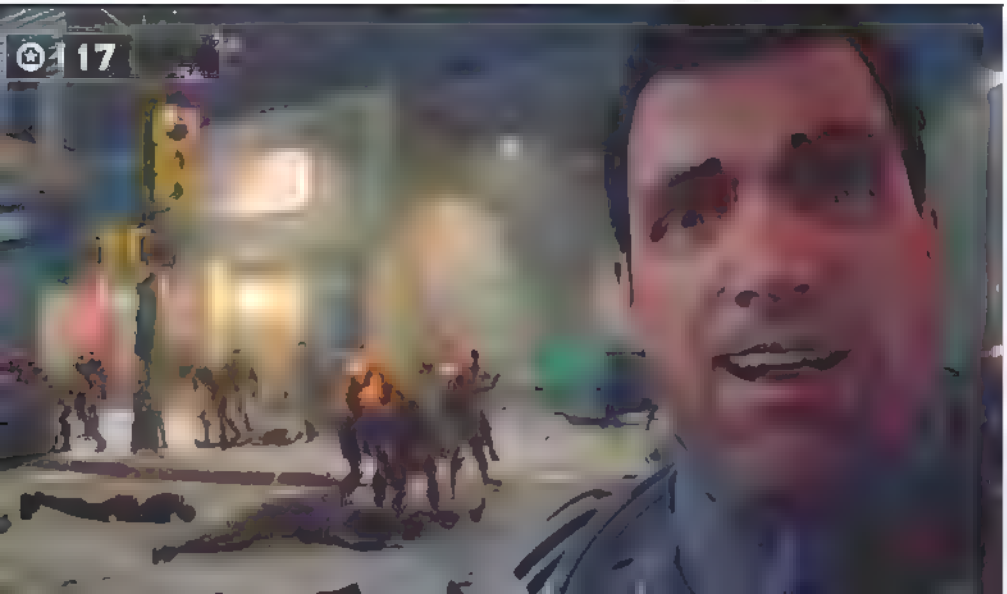
Land on an island where it's hunt or be hunted as you endeavour to be the last man standing or smash your way through hordes of zombies by any means necessary!

By **ANDRE COETZER**

PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUND

Finally, the world's most popular game makes its console debut as the Battle Royale inspired PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUND (PUBG) finally appears on the Xbox. The premise is simple, 100 unarmed players all jump into one aeroplane that flies over the isolated island of Erangel, a fictional abandoned island in the Black Sea near Rus-

sia. Each player gets to decide where to exit the plane parachuting down to any area on the map. Once on the ground it turns into a foot race to find the best possible guns or armour, which is scattered all around the island. Every few minutes a specific area on the map is marked with a white circle and all 100 players will have to make their way towards it before a deadly blue electrical force field closes in on them. What started out as a massive island slowly shrinks down into a deadly small space, where players will have to use various tactics and a big chunk of luck to make sure they are the last one standing. The game as it stands is not finished, and can be quite buggy, but the guys at Bluehole Studio Inc are constantly updating the game with new features being released on a regular basis. Currently, PUBG is only available on Steam and Xbox Game Preview, and thus can only be bought online, with the physical copy only being released when the game is 100% completed. But don't let that put you off from playing arguably the biggest game in recent times. It's incredibly fun with a group of friends and remains one of the most intense experiences on any gaming platform.



DEAD RISING 4: FRANK'S BIG PACKAGE

Originally an Xbox and PC exclusive, Capcom's seminal zombie killing series, Dead Rising 4 finally makes its way onto the PlayStation 4. It's the holiday season in Willamette, Colorado and a mysterious outbreak has overrun the Willamette Memorial Megaplex Mall and surrounding town with dangerous and deadly predators. Join returning hero Frank West as you explore a vast, open world with dangerous new zombies and a million ways to kill them as you seek to uncover the truth behind the outbreak or die trying. The game features an all-new collection of weapons and vehicles with the freedom for players to craft their own tools of zombie destruction. With massive improvements to the base game, Capcom has also thrown in a ton of extra new goodies for PS4 owners. Capcom heroes is a brand-new addition, that allows you to dress hero Frank West in numerous classic Capcom character outfits, from classic Mega Man to your favourite Street Fighter character. Once kitted out Frank gets the ability to use that character's specials moves, allowing for even more fun and exciting ways to kill off the zombie hordes. Naturally all the previously released DLC will be included as well, from additional single-player content to the multiplayer action in Super Ultra Dead Rising 4 Mini Golf. Dead Rising 4: Frank's Big Package is loaded with new content, but the original game still captures the essence of what made the series so popular. It's never been more fun to smash your way through zombies in a variety of creative and gruesome ways.

Supercuts

Meredith has always been an excellent student. Now she's studying seduction

That spring, spying on Meredith in AP chem, Trevor and Neil had exulted to see that she didn't know to cross her legs when she wore miniskirts. Every day they made bets on which underwear she'd be wearing. There was a rotation of patterns—flowers, bees, candy or polka dots—that coordinated with the colour of the polo shirt she wore and the narrow ribbon she wove into a skinny braid in her long hair. When they figured out her obsession with matching they thought it was hilarious. After that it wasn't hard to guess right. They kept a tally of the underpants-guessing competition, and whoever had the low score at the end of each week bought the winner a quart Koolee.

When, as graduation neared, the rumour went around that Meredith had started seeing a professor at the college, they made bets on that too. Trevor said it was definitely true; Neil wasn't sure. But winning this bet required serious sleuth work. To track the underpants, they only had to go to the front of the classroom, get a Bunsen burner or a beaker from the lab cupboard, then return to their desks, stealing a glance under Meredith's chair on their way back. She sat carelessly, legs uncrossed, absorbed in her textbook, unaware of what she was showing, or leaned back, chatting with Ella, which gave an even better view. To find out what she was up to with the professor, they had to devise a more elaborate strategy. They concocted plans, bought night-vision goggles and other equipment, made charts, called themselves Supercops.

Meredith had no idea of any of this. She completely disassociated her newest extracurricular activity from her high school life, and, really, from herself. If anyone had asked her about it point-blank—which they wouldn't have, because practically everyone in school was a nerd or a Baptist, and because Meredith was a goody-two-shoes, in spite of her lapses at leg-crossing—she would have denied it.

But that semester, the last few months before she would leave Kansas to go to Brown, Meredith—the good girl, the polyglot bookworm, indulger of siblings, pleaser of parents, singer of songs, maker of puff pastry—had decided she needed to learn sex before she went out East. She did not want to feel like a rube among the Ivy League freshmen, who she thought would ooze jaded ennui. She approached her sexual initiation like an elective you'd take to pad your college application—like photography or tennis or candy-striping. She wanted to master it, to become truly proficient, before she landed on campus.

And so, a few months before graduation, she was relieved to meet a tutor who could instruct her in the physical rites of passage, a young professor at the college where her parents taught. Young in his own estimation, that is—he was 30, which to her, at 18, seemed monstrously, unknowably old. She had met him on spring break in Tulum, where he'd ended up with her family and two other families from the college, on a Mayan temples trip. He'd had a breakup, was at loose ends, she overheard the adults saying sotto voce as their group wandered Cobá. On the beach in Tulum, he laid his towel beside hers, spoke with her of Duras and Dante, bought her a green coconut with the top cut off and a straw in it so she could drink its juice, told her to call him Mark, not Professor. On the last night of the holiday, she crept out of her villa after the others were asleep and joined him on the beach, where he'd said to. He kissed her in the dark, on the sand, amid the palms. Her face was sunburned, his stubble made her chin bleed. Stubble! She had never encountered it before, in chastely heated make-out sessions with debate-club boyfriends who barely needed to shave. He was older, which was strange, but she decided it was an advantage. When you looked for a teacher, you wanted someone with experience.

Back in Kansas, embarking on the course in earnest and in stealth, she found her new subject challenging. She had never done anything below the waist before, apart from rare instances of cautious fumbling over jeans. Each time she advanced a step with the professor beyond the moral code she had absorbed from Laura Ingalls Wilder, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, she recoiled inwardly, felt sullied. But she forced herself to overcome her repugnance and stubbornly soldier on with the professor's teaching, to stop being Laura, who didn't even kiss Almanzo until he proposed, or innocent Kitty, devastated by Vronsky, she needed to become Anna Karenina or Elena Kuragina—to corrupt herself in Kansas so she could respect herself in Rhode Island. Amid these daunting assignments, she sometimes went to look at herself in the bathroom mirror in the professor's little bungalow, as if to make sure she was still there. Contemplating her smooth, freckled face in the glass, she imagined she saw moral flaw mottling her skin, though any change was quite invisible. She got Mark to go to the Piggly Wiggly and get Ivory soap for her, thinking its harshness would blanch, purge her, but it was too drying, and she went back to Phisoderm.

This education proceeded across sporadic evenings that April and May, when Meredith would tell her parents she was driving off to see her friends Ella and Sophie, which sometimes she was and sometimes wasn't. She didn't see the professor that often. Maybe twice a week. Maybe three times.times. When she drove to his place after dinner or choir practice or school newspaper meetings, there would be wine and records in his living room — he played albums she didn't know, Leon Redbone, Patti Smith — then the inevitable move to the bedroom, where she submitted herself to the fascination and fright of learning how a grown man's body worked, testing her response, her reactions, as they drew nearer the goal, postponing its conclusion. She wasn't ready yet, she told him, but soon. Then, well before midnight, the tipsy drive home in the Volkswagen, looping around the empty traffic circle by the campus strip, then up the steps to her demure bedroom, the floral bedspread, the cat, the reading lamp, her little brother and sister asleep down the hall. Breakfast with the family in the morning, then the drive to school, to first-hour chemistry class, taking her seat at her desk in front of Ella's.

There were also the usual end-of-term exams and parties, the concert choir performance, ball games, the school play. One weekend in May, she and Ella helped Meredith's mother throw a garden party for her father's department, making 200 chicken vol-au-vents. Putting on white aprons to serve them, they felt like soubrettes in farce. Mark was there, he flirted with her mother. Meredith spoke with him briefly, politely, dissembling. Then, of course, there was prom. She and Ella and Sophie triple dated; Ella and Meredith took fresh-scrubbed boys who were just school friends, but Sophie, who was a junior, went with her boyfriend, Joel, a senior. The parents all gathered at Meredith's house, the mothers and fathers photographing the boys in their tuxes, the girls in their rose and white gowns, under the flowering magnolia. Meredith never considered inviting the professor to her prom — unthinkable! But she and Sophie conferred privately about their separate exploits, comparing notes on the everything-but mechanics they were exploring. Sophie loved Joel, but they hadn't gone all the way—not yet—but they were probably about to.

Meredith had fixed on the 50th anniversary of D-day for her deflowering. She had wanted to make sure it did not happen until after graduation, so she would not become a statistic, lowering the collective virtue of America's high school girls by being "sexually active" before commencement. She told herself that, after graduation, a woman not only had the right, she had the responsibility to use her body the way she saw fit — or what was feminism for? The pill had been around for decades, couples lived together before marriage these days, a young woman should be as free to sow her wild oats as a man. Her only obstacle was her own inhibition. On June 6, after overcoming that ultimate hurdle with Mark, she was relieved to have"done it" at last, to have been disburdened of her ignorance. She was surprised, soon after, to find herself troubled by unexpected misgivings, the forlorn intimation that her loss of virginity felt to her like a loss of honour. Not because of its irreversible physical aspect, which she did not think mattered, but because she was not in love with the person she had chosen to initiate her, which she thought did.

Before D-day, Meredith recognized afterwards, everything she had read or seen in novels and in life had led her to associate the granting of the final favour with profound, overwhelming, passionate love. Focused on her objective, she had forgotten about that. Remembering it now, she felt stricken. Through her single-mindedness, had she done violence to her heart? She knew she had responded genuinely to the professor's ardour and assertiveness. She had admired him, was flattered to be singled out by one so much older, tantalised by the thought of what he could teach her. But love? No. Ashamed, she began to absent herself psychologically from her encounters with the professor, even as she continued trying to improve her skills, to achieve fluency. She was puzzled when she caught him in mental evasions of his own.

"*Prosciutto e melone...*," he whispered into her ear once, as he moved his hand down her adolescent waist with constant, urgent pressure.

"Do you think I don't know that means ham and cantaloupe?" she had said, insulted, flipping over on the mattress, putting her back between them. Wasn't it enough for him that she was a teenager? He had more than a decade on her. Did he need to patronise her too, to see her as gullible and unschooled, in order to desire her? Why? Didn't he remember they'd spoken Italian on the beach in Tulum, had watched a Fellini film on campus? Why would he try to trick her that way? Another time, while they were actually doing it, he had said brusquely, "Don't tease me." She had stopped their play at once, bristled, said incredulously, "Tease you? There's nothing I'm not giving you!" It had only been two weeks since she had stopped being a virgin. It rankled that he would lean so soon on fantasy. Mark had looked at her, annoyed, embarrassed, and at once she comprehended, read in his eyes that sex in itself was not sex, it was what your mind made of it. There was something hot, something specifically adult, in that knowledge, it was part of the lesson, that even when you were finally, actually, really having sex, you could crave something beyond it. Maybe something more, maybe something less, maybe something else entirely.

Sometimes Meredith wished she'd chosen one of her Kansas high school friends to learn on instead—like Trevor or Neil, who spoke in *Star Trek* voices and Monty Python quotations—instead of the grown-up professor, whose five-o'clock shadow made her chin raw. But the boys would have gossiped, and she knew Mark wouldn't. The professor worked at the college with her parents, which was potentially compromising, something they both understood without needing to talk about it. It would have felt indecent to Meredith to mess with her high school friends. They were virginal National Merit finalists like her finalists likeher and Ella, they played UNO and Boggle together, danced at school mixers, knew each other's parents, Neil even had a gourmet club. What could they possibly teach each other of Eros? Also, she was not remotely attracted to them.

She was attracted to the professor, or at least to histohis attraction for her. As aoldest child, she was primed to seek adult approval. Approval this direct, this overt, made her feel she was

SHE APPROACHED HER SEXUAL INITIATION LIKE AN ELECTIVE. SHE WANTED TO MASTER IT, BECOME TRULY PROFICIENT.

TREVOR DIMMED THE HEADLIGHTS, PUT THE DART IN PARK AND PULLED THE BINOCULARS FROM THE DASHBOARD.

achieving distinction, like winning a trophy in debate, and she wanted it to continue. His desire pulled her in like a magnetic field, even as she told herself it carried no real emotional charge. When he spoke to her tenderly, she did not believe his words, supposed he was playing a role, repeating a practised script, "*Prosciutto emelone*." She objectified him, found it hard to see someone so removed from her own sphere, from her own age group, as real. That was fair, she thought. It made them even. As she improved at sex with him, got used to it, began to enjoy it, she did not wish she had "saved" it for someone else, she wished she had done it earlier, with the first boy she truly loved, back in Illinois, where her family had lived before they moved to Kansas midway through high school. Her smart, cruel debate-club boyfriend, to whom she had categorically refused the act, though she yearned for it, whom she had cried over for a year after their breakup, when she was 14. Then she would not have needed to undergo Mark at all.

She never heard Trevor's car outside of the professor's bungalow, coasting slowly onto the gravel scree at the back of his drive. Never heard Trevor and Neil rustling in the bushes by the bedroom. Never knew about the Supercops.

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As the car turned slowly into the alley, Trevor dimmed the headlights and Neil scooched down in the passenger seat, folding his legs into the hollow under the Dodge Dart's glove compartment, his rear-end hovering above the floormat. The darkened car nosed past the overgrown junipers between the alley and the professor's house, and paused at the edge of the driveway. It came to rest within lobbing distance of the front stoop. Trevor put the Dart in park and pulled his binoculars from the dashboard.

"Check," he said, in a nasal whisper.

"What can you see?" Neil hissed.

"Wait a second, give me time to focus." Though the porch light was off, the blinds at the living room window weren't fully rolled down. A wide sliver of light made a narrow viewing panel. Neil could see shadows blurrily flickering. Trevor clutched his Koolee and took a long slurp.

"Hurry up!" Neil said. "We don't have all night."

Trevor put down the Koolee and held the binoculars to his eyes.

"What are they doing?" Neil asked.

"I can't see anything."

"Wrong end of the binoculars, moron."

"F#ck you, it's dark." Trevor flipped the binoculars. "They're on the couch. I can see her shoulder—she's not wearing a bra."

"I knew it!" Neil said and jotted a note into his log. Opening a bag of Doritos, he grabbed a handful. "Can you see her tits?" he asked,crunching.

"No, his back is to the window. But second base for sure."

Neil crowed wickedly., "'And after the spanking, the oral sex!'"

"'Bum, bum, bum, another one bites the dust.'"

Half an hour earlier Trevor and Neil had followed Meredith's Volkswagen out of the parking lot of the Piggly Wiggly, keeping a couple cars between hers and the Dart, until she'd turned into the alley behind the professor's place. Then they'd stopped at Quik-Trip and gotten Koolees and Doritos. The car reeked of corn syrup, Mexican spice and salt.

"Wait, he's standing up," Trevor said. "Take notes. He's getting a bottle of wine."

"Is she drinking? She doesn't drink, does she?"

"She must, there are two glasses."

"Only two? Sure it's not a threesome?"

"Idiot. Take a note. Wine, two glasses. Okay.
They're drinking."

"Can you see her tits now?"

"I...wait. They're getting up; they're going to the bedroom."

"Hot damn!" Neil crowed. In his Spock voice he blurted, "Bed, the final frontier."

"Shut up!"

"I'll get the night-vision goggles."

"Moron, the lights are on."

"Moron yourself, the bedroom is dark."

"It's on the other side of the house," Trevor hissed.

"So let's get out of the car and go around."

"What if they hear the doors?"

"They won't!"

"We could get arrested."

Neil glared at Trevor in the dark. "Some Supercop you are. Don't be a girl."

"We won't see anything more tonight. We might as well go", Trevor said.

"Don't be lame," Neil whined. "Reverse into the alley, we'll go in on foot."

In the distance, a siren wailed faintly in the night, then receded.

"Too risky," said Trevor. "We'll come earlier next time, when it's light enough to use the binoculars. We'll bring hedge clippers, and if anyone catches us, we'll say we're gardeners."

"Do you think they do it in daylight?"

"Give her time."

"Trevor!" Neil said in a panic. "It's 9:40! I've got 10 P.M. curfew. We'll have to come back tomorrow."

Trevor stowed his binoculars in the glove compartment and backed the Dart out of the drive as quietly as he could.

For weeks now, before graduation and then after, Trevor and Neil had discreetly tailed Meredith between school and her house, between her house and the professor's place, and everywhere in between, mostly Ella's or Sophie's houses or Pizza Shuttle or the campus library. Her parents were obviously completely clueless. They must have trusted her implicitly. Trevor and Neil knew better. Meredith was up to something, and the Supercops were going to get to the bottom of it.

For a while, they'd had doubts. The first week they'd racked up 90 miles on the odometer, cautiously following Meredith after school, and had come up with nothing. Ella's mom was on the lawn once when they drove by and had waved to them to come on in. They'd played a game of Boggle with Meredith and Ella around the kitchen table. They almost abandoned the investigation that night.

But the next day Neil's mom had sent him on an errand to the Piggly Wiggly right before curfew. As he was checking out, he saw Meredith coming through the door, hurrying to the back of the store. She clearly did not have a curfew. Sneaking back through the cereal aisle, he watched her pick up a prescription, and hid behind a tower of Froot Loops so she wouldn't spot him. As soon as he could, he hurried to his car, just managing to catch up with her Volkswagen as she exited the parking lot, and followed her to the drive that turned out to lead to the professor.What had she been picking up at the pharmacy, so late? Was it the pill? A diaphragm? The Supercops would find out. Meredith had no idea. Neil could not wait to tell Trevor.

They would have to adjust their methodology

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Early in July, Meredith's father found an indiscreet letter she had left lying out in her bedroom and discovered the affair. . By then she had already ended it, resenting the feeling of being younger, controlled, underestimated. The professor had taken her to an opulent (for-Kansas) restaurant, a little ways out of town, a place that looked like Pepé Le Pew's boudoir — floor-length velvet curtains, upholstered rococo settees. That's what had clinched it. As they sat across a candelabraed table draped with plastic flower garlands, awaiting their escargots, afraid of being recognised, Meredith suddenly saw the trite caricature they presented to outside eyes. She was not, after all, a brave, clearsighted modern woman who'd engineered an elegant solution for her sexual inexperience; was just a naive young girl being seduced by an older man man. That night, back at the bungalow, she had broken up with Mark, then returned to her family, her friends, her novels and her teenage-hood. She took Ella out to dinner a couple of times soon after, to Applewood or the Mexican cantina, paying for both of them with her babysitting money to show herself. Anyone could pay for dinner, for anyone. It didn't mean the person who paid for you had something over you. She had been relieved to have the deed done, the lesson learned, the professor gone, so the prior pattern of her days could resume while most of summer still remained.

But the prior pattern did not resume, not at first. Her father was devastated when he found the letter, her mother told her—her strong, gentle, benevolent, protective father, whom Meredith had never disappointed before. Leaving aside the question of what she'd done, her mother said, how could she have left such a compromising letter in plain sight? Did she have no sense? What if her brother and sister had seen it? Meredith sobbed with remorse, crushed by her father's heartache, her own incaution. She did not know how to make things right. It had not occurred to her that her experiments with Mark could hurt her parents, she had only worried vaguely about the risk of Mark's getting in trouble if they were caught— not imagining she herself might get in trouble, or even knowing what that would mean, given that she'd never been in trouble before. She wasn't a rebel, hadn't regarded what she was doing with the professor as rebellion, exactly. She had thought she was being prudent, thought she was. .well, covering all the bases. So she would be safe when she was out in the world on her own.

She did not know how to prove to her parents that she was still the same, still on track, that her conscience and ambition remained intact. Meredith assured them the thing wasn't as serious as they thought, that it never had been, and that it was definitely over in any case. But they did not believe her. They assumed she must be deeply in love, no matter what she said, that she would not go to Brown but stay in Kansas, marry the professor, derail the brilliant future they had envisioned for her, toward which she had moved so surely, so unerringly, for so long.

SHE'D NEVER BEEN IN TROUBLE BEFORE. SHE WASN'T A REBEL, HADN'T REGARDED WHAT SHE WAS DOING AS REBELLION.

The professor did not understand. He could not call Meredith at her house because of her parents, and she would not call him, traumatised by her parents' distress. He wrote her long, condescending, tortured letters, his anger mystified her. In one, he pettishly apologised for having made her "wheel her tricycle so near the abyss." She ignored the letters, but when more came she finally responded with a letter of one line: "I don't see the point of beating a dead horse." She was confused by his display of emotion, was he feigning it out of injured pride? She had not thought it conceivable that he had genuine feelings for her. Had he ever seen her as anything other than an 18-year-old girl he was sporting with? She hadn't thought so. Was there something she had missed?

The Supercops didn't understand either. Neil and Trevor came by her house in the Dart late in July, when she and Ella and Sophie were suntanning on the roof, drinking Cokes, listening to Cat Stevens. The boys climbed up the ladder and joined them.

"Looks like you're back...," Trevor said, leadingly.

"What do you mean?" Meredith said, perplexed, unaware of their abandoned campaign.

"I haven't gone anywhere."

"Nudge, nudge, wink, wink," Neil snickered.

"Neil, you are so not funny," Meredith said, and went down the ladder to get the mail, more Cokes and some Bugles.

By then she had long since stopped talking about the professor with Ella or Sophie. She had moved on. Sophie talked a lot about Joel (they were sleeping together now, he was going to the local college, she would join him there the following year). Ella and Meredith flipped through the freshman facebooks that had come in the mail, dreaming of the distant campuses where their families would drop them in a month, far from Kansas. The next week, when Meredith went with her parents to Walmart to buy supplies for her dorm room—sheets, towels, extension cords, hangers, a bulletin board—she sensed their confidence in her rekindling, their hopes for her rebuilding. By the time they went shopping for her school clothes and winter coat, a few days before the long car trip east, she felt the beam of their trust had regained its earlier force. She felt dizzy with gratitude. It was like the return of the face of the sun.

Why couldn't they all understand? She had just wanted to learn. Was that so strange, so wrong? At Brown, freshman year, she wouldn't have sex at all, she wouldn't need to, because now she wasn't insecure about not knowing how. She could return to the warm, clothed caresses of debate-club-style courtship—ice cream, make-out sessions, second base if she felt like it. She could wait for love, for inclination. What was the hurry? ■

"Remember, flower child, watch your pollen."

Rachel Kronish

Photography by **LUCAS PASSMORE** *Text by* **SAMANTHA JACK**

Hobbies and interests
I'm a bit of a nerd, I love reading by the pool, hiking, and dog park visits with my pug

Goals and career ambitions
I've actually hit a few of my career goals this past year - I walked New York Fashion Week for the second time, and I would definitely say being in Playboy is a milestone for me!

Who inspires me
I'm a huge fan of Michelle Obama. I think it's so important for women to have strong role models, and I appreciated the level of education and elegance she brought to the White House

My favourite quote
"It's only with the heart that one sees clearly. What's essential is invisible to the eye." - Antoine de Saint Exupéry

Turn-ons
Confidence, intelligence, and a great sense of humour

Turn-offs
Selfishness and arrogance (big turn-offs!)

The perfect date
All-you-can-eat pancakes at IHOP. Not kidding

Hips: 94cm
Height: 1.73m
Weight: 51kg
Eye Colour: Blue

TOONS BUNNY

SNOW FIGHT

HERITAGE

GOING VINYL

A brief history of Playboy's little-known foray into the music business

This is the story of an independent record label you may never have heard of, for it flamed out— freighted with some number one songs and albums— after about seven years. The label? Playboy Records

By **CAT AUER**

Even the man who would become the label's biggest star, country singer Mickey Gilley, had no idea Playboy Records existed before he signed with it in 1974. When Nashville producer Eddie Kilroy suggested the company might be interested in Gilley's single "Room Full of Roses," Gilley thought he was joking. "I said to him, 'Do you mean to tell me Mr. Hugh Hefner is in the record business? Well, I knew he had a magazine!'" Gilley adds that he used to include the anecdote in his stage banter. "It'd get a big laugh."

But why did the man with the magazine dip his toe into the record business in the first place? Back in the early 1970s, Hugh Hefner's empire was booming. The company had gone public in late 1971, with Playboy Enterprises, Inc. comprising five divisions: the magazine; other publishing ventures including a book imprint, the Playboy Clubs, hotels and casinos; a products and services division that operated a modeling agency, a limousine service and more; and an entertainment division, which ran a production house and a small arthouse theater chain. Total sales had ballooned from $89 million in 1968 to $159 million in 1972. So when the entertainment division decided to get into music, it seemed like a natural move.

"Essentially, we were diversifying into new areas we felt had great commercial potential," Hef says of those days. "And a music label was another way I felt we could help our audience connect with the good life they were reading about in Playboy magazine."

Playboy Records formed in the fall of 1971, staffing up in its original office on Sunset Boulevard. The location was in "the heart of the music industry," says Dick Rosenzweig, who as the eventual West Coast head of operations was involved with the label from the mid- 1970s through its end in 1978. In 1972 Playboy Records released about half a dozen vinyl LPs and more than twice as many 45s. The fare was mainly pop, soft rock and folk rock, but the label also dabbled in blues, soul and funk. Artists who released Playboy-anointed music that flagship year include Tim Rose, Jim Sullivan, Bobby Scott and Sam Russell. The first single, a tune called "Leavin' It's Over" by a trio of brothers called Hudson, hit the number 110 spot, just below Billboard's Hot 100.

The label made a prescient call in 1972, licensing several pop songs from Polar Music, a Swedish company. The act in question was called Björn and Benny, and its first seveninch on Playboy, featuring the songs "People Need Love" and "Merry-Go-Round," came out that year, followed by three more in 1973. By then the group had changed its name to Björn and Benny with Anna and Frieda—which was later revised to ABBA. None of the songs caught on stateside, a failure that longtime ABBA manager Stig Anderson attributed to the young label's weak distribution network. ABBA, of course, was unscathed. The group won the Euro vision Song Contest in 1974 with "Waterloo" and went on to megastardom.

With no major successes in the pop realm, the label made a play for the country market. In 1974 Tom Takayoshi, Playboy Records executive vice president, phoned Eddie Kilroy to get a sense of how the company could find a winner in that world—right around the time Mickey Gilley was looking for a home for "Room Full of Roses."

"All the record companies in Nashville I took it to either didn't show up or said we can probably record something later, maybe. I knew what that meant—basically a no," Gilley remembers. "As I was getting ready to leave, I called Eddie Kilroy. He says he has a company that'll take it, and I says, 'Who?' I went over to his office and he threw a little 45 with a bunny head on it at me, and I just couldn't believe it."

"Mickey and I flew out to L.A., and Playboy signed Mickey, hiring me about the same time," says Kilroy. "We got off on the right foot because that first Playboy single out of Nashville was number one." With Kilroy producing from a brand-new Playboy Records outpost in Nashville, he and Gilley followed "Room Full of Roses" with a string of number one country songs and albums—successes that helped buoy the otherwise struggling label. "We blindsided Nashville in 1974 and had a wild ride while we were there," Kilroy says.

"It was really a fun trip, because Nashville was a stronghold controlled by the establishment, by some of the old major labels," remembers Kilroy, who would eventually be a president at Playboy Records. "Well, along comes this little label called Playboy, with a staff consisting of myself and a 17-year-old in her first job. There were two people in our office, with a number one record! People in Nashville said, 'Wait a minute, that can't be happening. We've got 300 people, including all of our field people at each label, and this itty-bitty label with one artist is number one.' It was driving them nuts."

The Nashville office was far outpacing its West Coast counterpart in terms of hits, but that's not to say the Los Angeles office didn't produce an occasional winner. In 1975, Playboy Records had its first and only number one pop song, "Fallin' in Love" by Hamilton, Joe Frank and Reynolds. The song is less obscure than you might think. It was the subject of a lawsuit filed by Playboy in 2010—more than 30 years after the label was shuttered— when Drake sampled its opening riff in "Best I Ever Had" without permission. (The suit was settled in 2011.)

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Naturally, there were some missteps along the way. Playboy Records said no thanks not once but twice to Tom Petty and his band. Pete Welding, a rep at the L.A. office, turned them down by mail. "He rejected us, but he was nice enough to send us a song-by-song analysis of why he was rejecting us.... I took this to be really encouraging," Petty told Paul Zollo in *Conversations With Tom Petty*. "We went to Playboy Records to see Pete Welding, but he no longer worked there. We walked in, and we said we'd come all this way, and they put the tape on, and the guy turned it off in 30 seconds, didn't even hear the whole song, and said, 'No, we pass.'" Petty didn't have to look far for a taker—both Shelter Records and London Records made offers.

To some, it seemed the Los Angeles office had a quality-control problem. "They had a really bad reputation in L.A. If an independent producer had an artist and couldn't place him anywhere, the joke around L.A. was 'Take it to Playboy. They'll buy anything,'" says Kilroy. "They didn't have anybody with what we'd call ears, who could say, 'Yeah, this is a hit, that isn't a hit.' And that's the most important thing."

But the label also had plenty of high points. One came in 1973, when Welding and Lawrence Cohn, an executive, earned a Grammy nomination for *Leadbelly*, the only live concert recording of famed folk musician Huddie Ledbetter, a gem taped decades earlier that Playboy Records brought back to life. And in the mid-1970s, the Nashville office started pulling in accolades as well as putting out hit albums. Mickey Gilley won most promising male vocalist at the 1974 Academy of Country Music Awards, beginning a run of nominations and wins out of Nashville that culminated in 1976 with the label being called the "record company of the year" by the Country Music Association and Mickey Gilley winning best single, song, entertainer, male vocalist and album of the year at the Academy of Country Music Awards.

"Mickey won everything but female vocalist of the year," says Kilroy.

The label also signed Barbi Benton, who was not only an actress on the popular television show Hee Haw but also Hef's longtime girlfriend. Benton had been singing in some >>

Above: Benton sings "Help Me Make It Through the Night" for a very special Playboy Club audience member—Hef

"HEF FELT OUR ENTERTAINMENT OPERATIONS WERE A LITTLE BIT OUT OF CONTROL."

capacity all her life, but the decision to pursue a country career was strategic, she says. "I decided that if I'm going to sing professionally, I should start with country music, because I had a built-in audience of millions," Benton says, referring to the Hee Haw viewership. Although she was the girlfriend of the man in charge of it all, Benton says getting her career rolling wasn't exactly easy.

One day Hef walked in on Benton when she was doing a vocal exercise that required her to intentionally sing beyond her range. "Hef sat me down and said, 'You'll never be a singer,' " she remembers. "I said, 'I already am.' " She doubled up on singing lessons and doubled down on her career aspirations and was soon asked to perform at the San Francisco Playboy Club. Hef brought a large entourage to support her. Not long after, Benton began recording in the Nashville office and was nominated as most promising female vocalist in 1975 by the ACM. Her single "Brass Buckles" reached the top of the country charts, and she made several appearances on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson.

"When Barbi told me she wanted to be a singer, I admit I had my doubts," Hef says. "But she worked hard at it, practising every day, and her efforts paid off in spades. I was very proud of her achievements and still am."

Shel Silverstein, who wrote "A Boy Named Sue" (made famous by Johnny Cash in 1969) and who was a close friend of both Hef and Benton, as well as a longtime contributor to PLAYBOY magazine, wrote many songs for and with Benton. It was a Silverstein tune, "I Can't Touch the Sun," that Benton chose to perform for her first appearance on The Tonight Show.

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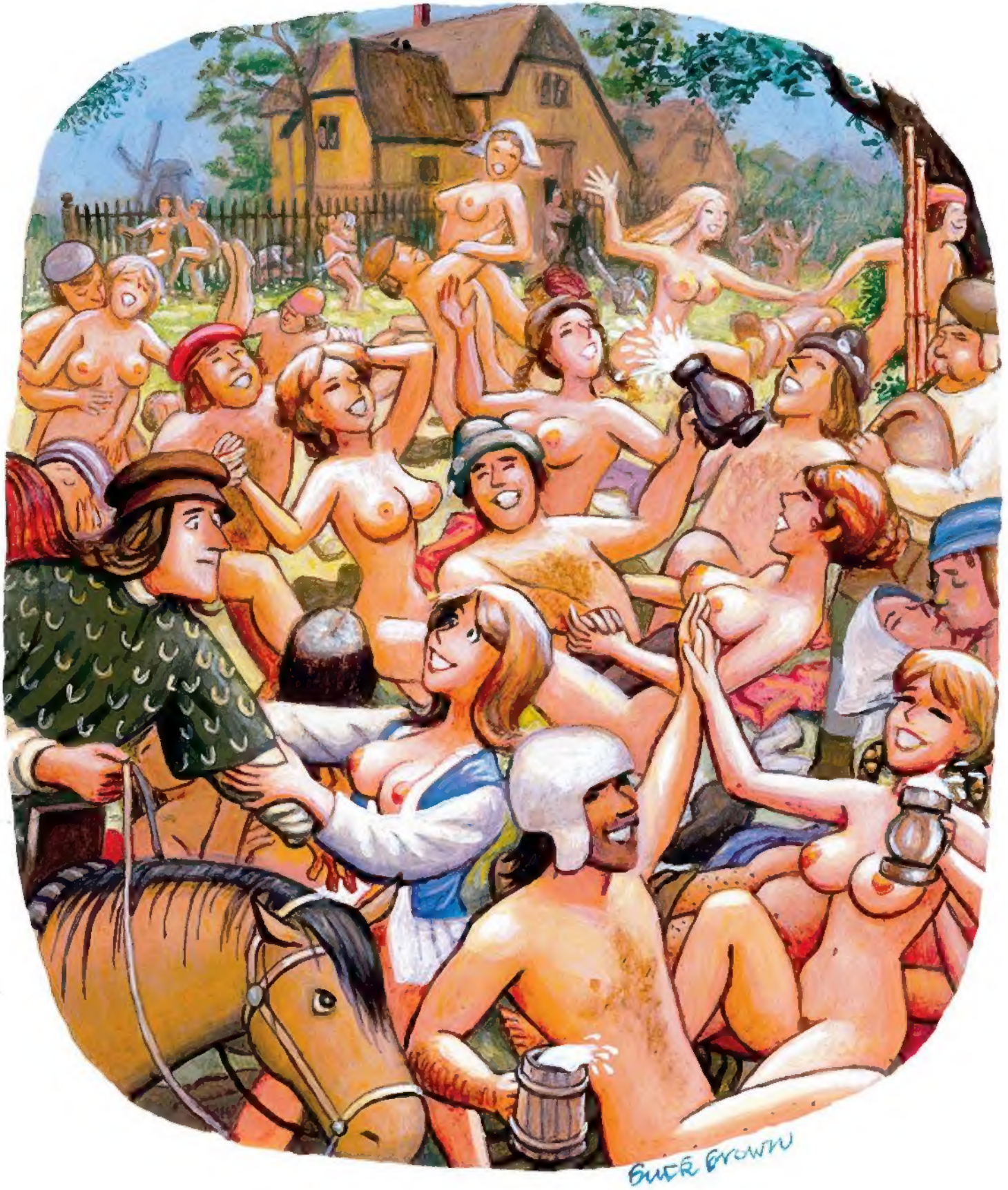
By 1977, despite its successes with country music, the label had been losing money year after year. "Hef felt our entertainment operations were a little bit out of control," remembers Dick Rosenzweig. At Hef's request, Rosenzweig moved to Los Angeles from the Chicago headquarters, taking on the role of head of West Coast operations.

"I felt the only thing to do was not just close it down but to see if I could sell it to another label," Rosenzweig says. He oversaw a deal under which Playboy Records changed hands by 1978. Business is business, and the writing had been on the wall.

"The last year, our net [in Nashville] was maybe $670,000," remembers Kilroy. "I don't think it was enough to keep the interest of Playboy Enterprises. You put that up beside some of the other things they had...." Still, the decision to sell was about more than the bottom line. Says Rosenzweig, "Had we continued with the record company, we could've kept the Nashville office with Mickey Gilley, Barbi Benton and others and done well, but I don't think we felt that Playboy was a country-and-Western label."

It may not have lasted long, but the label was a stepping-stone for several musical careers. Eddie Kilroy went on to be a president at MCA Nashville. Barbi Benton continued recording and still lives and breathes music. If she's not busy singing—a lot of opera these days—she might be found playing piano, guitar or banjo or teaching a group ukulele class.

Playboy Records' biggest star, Mickey Gilley, signed with Epic, striking it even bigger in 1980 when his version of "Stand By Me" was included in the John Travolta movie Urban Cowboy (much of which was filmed at Gilley's eponymous bar). Not only can you see his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, but you can still watch him perform. Gilley will be doing shows throughout the fall in Branson, Missouri—where fans might even hear that line about the magazine that, once upon a time, launched a record label. ■



"We're celebrating the end of winter with a flurry of dancing, plowing and planting; for some reason it's called spring break!"

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